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THE NATION

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LETTERS

SDS on draft

Corona del Mar, Calif.

DEAR SIRS: In "Laying Freedom on the Line" [*The Nation*, Mar. 20] Paul Good quotes David Mitchell as saying, "Students for a Democratic Society backed off from an anti-draft program after the Administration's get-tough policy scared them." He also quotes Staughton Lynd: "I don't understand why SDS decided not to emphasize an anti-draft program."

Perhaps these quotes are not very recent. I enclose for your information a copy of SDS's Anti-Draft Resolution, a major product of this winter's National Council meeting.

Because of SDS's decentralized democratic structure, of course, local chapters determine for themselves the extent to which they wish to emphasize anti-draft activity.

Leslie Lincoln

Miss Lincoln enclosed a copy of the SDS resolution which, among other points, authorizes SDS members to organize unions of draft resisters, and which opposes any attempt to "legitimize" Selective Service by currently proposed reforms —which would not in the view of the National Council change its basic purpose: "to abduct young men to fight in aggressive wars." *The Editors*

Lincoln on war

Decatur, Ga.

DEAR SIRS: An editorial in the Mar. 13 *Nation* describes President Johnson reading Abraham Lincoln's famous passage on criticism of Presidential war efforts, and thereby implying that Lincoln's Civil War role was similar to his own in Vietnam. Less well known, but perhaps equally topical, are Lincoln's views on the Mexican-American War as expressed in his *Campaign Autobiography, 1860*:

> . . . the President [Polk] had sent General Taylor into an inhabited part of the country belonging to Mexico, and not to the United States, and thereby had provided the first act of hostility, in fact the commencement of the war. . . . Mr. Lincoln thought the act of sending an armed force among the Mexicans was unnecessary, inasmuch as Mexico was in no way molesting or menacing the United States or the people thereof; and that it was unconstitutional, because the power of levying war is vested in Congress, and not in the President.

S. Schroeder

Friendship and Fratricide

New York City

DEAR SIRS: David Cort's review [*The Nation*, Mar. 20] of Meyer Zeligs' remarkable book, *Friendship and Fratricide*, has given it the stature and importance it deserves. . . . Dr. Zeligs demolishes Chambers' credibility. Mr. Cort concludes, just as did I, that Alger Hiss must be vindicated. . . .

Eleanor L. Furman

throwaway line

Northridge, Calif.

DEAR SIRS: Fred Cook's chilling article ["The Right Has Nine Lives," *The Nation*, Mar. 13] neglected a major dimension of the great right-wing brainwash. This is the local neighborhood newspaper—usually an advertising throwaway and almost always enthusiastically committed to the hard right-wing line. . . .

Nicholas V. Seidita

EDITORIALS

The Humphrey-Nixon Law

One of the great, though necessarily narrow, sociological discoveries of the century applies to Vice Presidents. It was first established during the Eisenhower administration, when Richard M. Nixon was so vehemently attacked by aggrieved Latin Americans that the President considered flying down an expeditionary force to bring him back in one piece. Now the law has been confirmed by Hubert Humphrey's recent experiences and observations in Europe. Like all recent great scientific formulations, the Humphrey-Nixon Law does not lend itself to precise description without a computer, but for the layman it may be stated in this fashion: When the Vice President ventures abroad, the louder the volume of the boos, the more jeering and flag ripping, the more paint and eggs thrown in his direction, the more splendid must be the reception accorded him on his return. The reasoning is that the more the Vice President has been affronted, the better must have been the job he did.

The law does not apply to lesser officials, such as Secretaries of State. It is conceivable that some day a Secretary may be thrown into a tar pit or down a manhole, but so far no one has bothered to notice Mr. Rusk or his predecessors, one way or the other.

For Vice Presidents, however, the law is infallible. If one of them journeyed to foreign parts and was greeted with applause and adulation, it would be the ruin of his career. Vice Presidents with an eye on the Presidency would do well to arrange to be driven from as many capitals as will cooperate—particularly those of friendly countries. An opera singer, however talented, must have the reassurance of a claque; the inverse rule, for the Vice President, is to be in danger at least of having his clothes ruined. The cry will then go up, "He can take it."

Some scientists have tried to draw the conclusion that the clamor of dissatisfied foreigners is directed not against the Vice President as a person but at this nation and its policies. There may be something to this, but it would not be good politics to admit it, since the policies of the United States will never be changed to suit other nations. We are the rulers and, as the Hon. Mendel Rivers has put it with laconic originality, they can go fly a kite. Another sound reason for keeping the intrepidity of the Vice President on a personal basis is that it redounds to the advantage of the incumbent President and his party. By putting on a big show and praising Mr. Humphrey's eloquence and ability, Mr. Johnson was also calling attention to his own qualities, which naturally must exceed those of his coadjutor. And, as a valuable by-product, all good Americans can see what dogs those Commies are, to abuse a good-natured man like Huber who comes to them with a big grin on his face, love in his heart, and just a whiff of napalm.

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With But One Voice

The Establishment has spoken. If one were looking for a classic demonstration of how it swings into line against one of its own who has had the temerity to deviate, no better example could be found than the reaction to Dr. Martin Luther King's declaration of opposition to the war in Vietnam. This is not to say that the Establishment is a monolith or that its members conspire to put down the dissenter. It is simply that the most sacred tenet of accepted institutions and those who adhere to them remains, with little modification, "my country right or wrong." When we are at war, no matter how infamous the war may be, you must not say publicly what a great part of the nation—and the world—thinks and says in private. If you do, the Establishment forgets its internal differences and unites against you.

Dr. King is certainly no firebrand, and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference has served as a bridge between the moderate civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP and the Urban League, and the militant Congress of Racial Equality and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Hence, as in all such cases, the chastisement begins with a tone more in sorrow than in anger, in the hope that the erring sinner, having learned his lesson, will return to the fold. Dr. King's "friends" have spoken of his "tragic" (or "monumental") mistake, the "sorrowful occasion" which compels them to part from him, the "grave injury" he has done to the civil rights movement and to himself. "Many who have listened to him with respect," *The Washington Post* editorializes, "will never again accord him the same confidence." His usefulness, in this view, is all but over, unless he repairs quickly to the mourners' bench.

What has happened, what is going to happen, tells much about Dr. King as a man and a moral leader; it tells even more about the Establishment. What did its officers expect him to do? Stand still, with summer coming up and tensions rising? The more sensible voices among those who deplore Dr. King's declaration are compelled to concede that the civil rights movement has been stymied, and that the war, if not the sole cause, is the principal one. So once again they expect the Negro to wait, despite the fact that the President could (*The Nation* does not advocate it), by imposing wage and price controls, carry on both the war and civil rights programs. But that would reduce the prospects for a continuance of profit at the level to which business has become accustomed—the more so because some slight faltering in the onrush of "prosperity" has become evident. This course does not appeal to Mr. Johnson, who, under his Populist cloak, is about as business-minded a President as any we have had in this century. Thus we behold once more the familiar spectacle of pseudo-liberalism seizing on a war in order to avoid expenditures it never liked and to which it yielded only under duress.

Deep down, commercial interests opposed, and will

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continue to oppose, expenditures for civil rights. They feel the civil rights movement has gone too far and too fast, that it should be cooled off for the duration of the war, and then we will see. These interests never object to war expenditures, or a $40 billion program for an anti-missile missile, or for a leap to the moon in this decade. The leaders of the moderate civil rights organizations have played along with the powers that be, hoping to placate them and to receive a measure of continued support, while giving their own members an impression of practicality merged with aggressiveness. This dual role Dr. King has now made more difficult, and the leaders don't like it.

One of the biggest myths of U.S. politics, and the most convenient for the Establishment, is that foreign policy has no relation to domestic need. The fact is, quite apart from Vietnam, that one cannot push a reform movement as significant as the Negro's demand for full equality, and at the same time pursue a policy which makes us the world's policeman. The whole history of the civil rights movement shows the incompatibility. In the darkest days of the cold war, say from 1947 to 1955, Negro rights were shelved. There were splendid opportunities, as when Eisenhower came into office in 1952 and the Supreme Court made its decision in *Brown* v. *Board of Education* in 1954, but he did not act, nor did Congress. The 1955-65 decade saw a slight breather in the cold war, enough to make civil rights gains possible. Now, with the deepening involvement in Vietnam, things are at a standstill once more. The whole history refutes King's critics.

Equally to the point, King spoke because he cannot play fast and loose with the moral issues which American power and the zooming technology of war have forced on public notice. He could not urge his people to practice nonviolence in the streets of American cities and condone violence in the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam. It is significant that the NAACP did not attack King's moral stand, only his operational strategy. They would like to keep moral conviction and public action apart. But the time is past when the separation could be maintained. The partition has been broken, and it will not be rebuilt.

The critics who were never friends of King's, and who never made common cause with him, are more severe than those who have lost an ally—and the storm is only beginning. We are told that in proposing a boycott of the war he is stopping just short of sedition. The next step will be to accuse him of outright sedition, which is the verbal form of treason, and to try to shut him up. Dr. King has offered himself as the symbol of the moral force which got him his present prominence and the Nobel Prize. The imminent showdown may well center upon him. Whatever the consequences may be for King himself, the issues will be clearer for Negroes and whites alike by the time the voters go to the polls in 1968.

Dean Rusk at Cornell

Although the Humphrey-Nixon Law, aforementioned, prevents Mr. Rusk from getting attention on his travels abroad, he need not feel neglected at home. "When Dean Rusk came to Cornell," an SDS member of the welcoming committee writes, "we were waiting for him." It was not an SDS operation; the chapter was busy with preparations for a large-scale draft-card burning in connection with the April 15 anti-Vietnamese War march in New York City. The Inter-University Committee (IUC) was in charge of the arrangements to welcome Mr. Rusk, and its officers came to the conclusion that walk-outs, vigils and other customary forms of protest had proved ineffective. They got hold of several hundred death's-head masks and some 125 people agreed to wear them. (The *Ithaca Journal* of March 25 puts the number at about fifty.) When Mr. Rusk entered the Bailey Hall auditorium everything appeared normal, except for some walk-outs, but as the Secretary began to speak the death's-head contingent rose, turned their backs to the stage, donned the masks and took their places again. Photographs leave no doubt as to the effectiveness of the masquerade; even Mr. Rusk, whom nature has endowed with the composure of a cigar store Indian, must have been startled.

The meeting was moderated by Cornell president, James Perkins, who ushered Rusk out after a question-and-answer period that the hostile portion of the audience considered too brief. One question was whether the Red River dikes were a possible future bombing target. The questioner loaded the query with the information that the breaching of the dikes would cost between 2 million and 5 million civilian lives and concluded: "If you do not choose to commit yourself, we can only conclude, Mr. Secretary, that the United States wishes to reserve the right to commit genocide in Vietnam."

A verbatim text of Mr. Rusk's reply to this soft impeachment is not available, but it was to the effect that the United States had refrained from bombing the dikes out of consideration for civilians and there was no present intention of changing this policy. However, in a familiar riposte, he challenged the questioner to get a reciprocal guarantee from the North Vietnamese Government not to bomb dikes in South Vietnam. Since the questioner did not have a hot line open to Hanoi, the exchange ended in a draw, with some of the audience wondering where the South Vietnamese dikes were located and why nothing had been said about them before.

Mr. Rusk turned aside some questions and was booed by the maskers and their sympathizers. Later, both he and President Perkins are said to have admitted that the masks made them uncomfortable, and Mrs. Rusk is supposed to have cried "all the way home"—presumably not all the way to Washington. Except for the local press, the masks were ignored by the reporters. TV crews were on hand but were barred from the auditorium.

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NASA: THE IMAGE MISFIRES

WILLIAM HINES

Mr. Hines is science editor of the Washington Star *and a syndicated columnist on science and space affairs. He is the author of* Conquest of the Moon *(Pyramid), and has won major awards for science journalism.*

Washington

Even the American public's almost boundless gullibility is being strained by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's performance in the Apollo affair. An explanation hardly more valid than agent Maxwell Smart's "sorry about that, Chief" on WNBC-TV is being offered in extenuation of an accident that took three lives at Cape Kennedy's Pad 34 last January 27.

In essence, NASA's case ten weeks after Grissom, White and Chaffee died rests on the working of Murphy's Law. This is an elegant adaptation of the so-called law of averages which states that if anything can possibly go wrong, it will. Murphy's Law relies on the fictitious perversity of inanimate objects; by implication, it eliminates the factor of human error.

The final report on the accident proper was published on April 9. A lengthy, detailed and apparently straightforward study of the facts, it discussed the proximate cause (an electrical malfunction) and criticized sloppy workmanship and management on the Apollo job. To insiders these conclusions came as no surprise, and the report did not do what desperately needs doing. It did not ask how such a situation could develop in a government agency supposedly dedicated to technological excellence. Judgments of this kind were not within the competence of the review board which studied the accident and made the report.

In the week preceding publication of the report, various personnel shifts were announced in the Apollo management structure of NASA, and more were promised. They were susceptible to various interpretations, but seemed at first glance to be not much more than a game of musical chairs, giving the appearance of movement and progress without doing anything very profound. NASA, whose initials are jokingly said to stand for "Never A Straight Answer," had a reputation for looseness with the truth. Unhappily the agency has snared itself in its own deceitful web.

In these flack-ridden times it is perhaps not surprising that the taxpaying public should be hoodwinked, falsely propagandized, deliberately misled and, on occasion, even lied to by its servants. It is deplorable, however, and dangerous in the bargain, that NASA has deluded itself into believing the reality of its own Image.

The Image is a myth 9 feet tall, compounded in equal parts of John Glenn and Dr. Robert H. Goddard, with just a dash of the Redeemer added for omniscience and omnipotence. Its exploits are chanted off-stage by a Greek chorus composed of Walter Cronkite, Frank McGee, Jules Bergman and Paul Haney. Its personal experiences are chronicled and preserved for the ages in the full-color pages of *Life*.

It is essential that The Image never show its feet of clay; everything NASA attempts must be crowned with success; probing the frontiers of technology and doing things never done before, NASA must always do them on schedule, within budgets, and just exactly right. There must be no defects, and if mistakes are occasionally made, people must not make them.

So it is convenient to have Murphy's Law to fall back on, as Kennedy Space Center director Kurt H. Debus found about ten days after the accident. "Despite meticulous attention to the smallest detail, this tragedy occurred," Debus said with a straight face to a meeting of space technologists; and they, with straight faces, received the "explanation."

Debus and his audience knew that slackness, corner cutting, schedule racing and slipshod workmanship have plagued the space effort since its inception in the fifties. An "in" joke among spacemen tells of an astronaut paying a triumphal post-flight visit to the factory where his spacecraft was built, and being asked if there was any particular individual he would care to meet.

"Yes," says the fictitious astronaut, "I'd like to meet the son of a bitch who welded his lunch box to the left yaw thruster."

John Glenn would never have said such a thing, but Gus Grissom would have—and on several occasions did. He was widely reputed to have been critical of workmanship going into Spacecraft 012, the hermetically sealed oven in which he perished. Grissom's suspicion of the Apollo spacecraft's quality was nothing new, and not directed solely at "Brand X," as North American Aviation, Inc., is known in the aerospace industry. Almost three years before he died, Grissom visited the Martin Company plant near Baltimore where the Titan II booster rocket for his "Molly Brown" Gemini flight was being built. After inspecting the work, Grissom grumped, "It'll never get off the ground." He was mistaken about the GT-3 rocket, but correct about a later one. Walter Schirra's Gemini 6 booster shut itself off just after ignition and without leaving the pad; it was discovered later that a mechanic had left a dust cap in a vital pressurizing line of one engine and that a quality control inspector had approved the work as properly done.

Before Gemini, Project Mercury was troubled with defective workmanship attributable not to the complexity of the task and the technology but to simple carelessness. An example: an installer ruined a critical sealing device by gouging it with a screwdriver while trying to force it into place. Simple carelessness—call it stupidity, which in many cases is what it is—remains a factor at Cape Kennedy today. As recently as March 16, a memo was circulated among Kennedy Space Center officials on the subject of "instrument abuse." Thousands of dollars' worth of repairs were required on delicate equipment because of misuse bordering on idiocy. For example, someone ruined a costly automatic chart-recording instrument by throwing the remains of his lunch into it. At the conclusion of Project Mercury in 1963, its operations director, Walter C. Williams, publicly chided industry for sloppy

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practices and expressed hope that future programs would benefit from some of Mercury's melancholy experience. This hasn't happened, and Williams has long since left NASA, a victim of a policy summed up in the phrase, "Don't create waves." His shunning by NASA has been complete; 1,500 "expert consultants" were rounded up to assist NASA's board of inquiry into the accident, but Williams was not among them.

When Williams' 1963 Mercury report was made public and its substance printed in the New York and Washington papers, Space Administrator James E. Webb was called to account before a Congressional committee. One of the capital's fastest talkers and most accomplished snow-job artists, Webb turned the occasion to his own advantage, using the Congressional forum to castigate the press for scandalmongering and to deliver a ringing defense of industry's splendid performance.

This is characteristic of NASA's permissive, protective attitude toward its industrial contractors, and possibly reflects Webb's own background. Before becoming Space Administrator in 1961, he was a director of the McDonnell Aircraft Co., the St. Louis aerospace concern that recently swallowed Douglas Aircraft. McDonnell had the capsule contract for Project Mercury and Project Gemini, and McDonnell-Douglas has a handsome piece of Apollo.

Webb's solicitude for his contractor friends extends beyond the old firm and persists to this day. In an enlightening exchange in the course of a Senate hearing last February 27, Webb revealed his concern for that most sensitive of aerospace-industry barometers, the stock market. Sen. Walter Mondale (D., Minn.) was pressing Webb for details of a report supposedly derogatory of North American Aviation's performance, and finally asked for a copy. Webb in effect refused.

"I would like to take that as a request, Senator Mondale," he said, "and examine it very carefully because, obviously, these companies are public companies. You have got many factors related to this and certain of these reports are regarded as of deep concern. What we would be very happy to do is make it available to the Comptroller General under any request that the committee or you would make to him. This provides a certain measure of control of these reports. . . ."

Later, Mondale said he did not know what Webb meant by his response; neither did James J. Gehrig, staff director of the Senate Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences, in whose hearing room the exchange occurred. No matter; Mondale never got the report he sought. Neither did Gehrig get a list of consultants active in the Apollo fire investigation. Webb blandly refused to submit it on grounds that this might interfere with the inquiry.

Webb, a florid-faced, overbearing man with *chutzpah* Sammy Glick never dreamed of, can hardly be blamed for getting away with whatever he can. The fault lies with the House and Senate "space" committees, which make it clear that he can get away with a very great deal. He gets away with less in his dealings with the appropriations committees, and in his appearances before the tough-minded and powerful Joint Committee on Atomic Energy (JCAE) he gets away with nothing. Executive privilege (sometimes called "the bureaucrat's Fifth Amendment") is not invoked before the JCAE; before the space committees it is a handy and frequently used foil.

The committees charged with supervising NASA's operations exercise, in general, only the loosest of supervision. With minor exceptions, this has consisted in asking NASA how NASA is doing and then printing the reply as a committee document. Close supervision, of the type exercised routinely by JCAE, is regarded as kibitzing and is discouraged. Early last year, when one of the House subcommittee chairmen tried to knock out a space project which he regarded as valueless, he was rebuffed and a NASA official publicly commented with some pique that Congress' job is to vote the money and leave the program planning to experts downtown. Congress, also, is expected not to create waves.

At the time of the Navy Court of Inquiry into the *Thresher* disaster, two JCAE staff men elbowed their way into the hearing room and sat through all sessions, secret as well as open, as official observers for the committee. They encountered some resistance at first, but asserted the committee's right—written into the Atomic Energy Act—to be kept "fully and currently informed" of all matters relating to nuclear energy. The Space Act of 1958 confers no such right on the space committees. Consequently, when the Apollo board was empaneled by NASA headquarters on January 28, it never occurred to either committee to send observers. In all probability they would not have been admitted.

In short, it has been the experience of the past several years that NASA gets what it wants from Congress. Perhaps this is because Congress as a whole has never taken the space program seriously. Despite adulation of the astronauts and lip service to the potentialities of lunar colonization, most legislators tend to look on space activities as a combination of Buck Rogers and Mickey Mouse. Space sneaked up on them gradually; by 1961, John Kennedy's proposal to send men to the moon, while bizarre, was not so manifestly outlandish as to call his sanity into question; at the same time, the notion was too far out to be taken altogether seriously when Kennedy broached it as an "urgent national need" after only 125 days in office. There is some question, indeed, if Kennedy himself cared very much that astronauts should actually land on the moon; possibly he may have looked on the moon journey as a convenient device to "get America moving again" and divert people's minds from the Bay of Pigs and Cosmonaut Gagarin.

Kennedy was frank enough with Congress in his May 25, 1961, "Message on Urgent National Needs." The task, he said, would be long, difficult and expensive, and should be undertaken only after full legislative and public discussion. "If we are to go only halfway, or reduce our sights in the face of difficulty, in my judgment it would be better not to go at all." But when the time came for discussion, there was none; suddenly it was Camelot again and the knights were riding out (in space suits rather than armor) in quest of a Holy Grail buried somewhere on Mare Tranquillitatis. The United States' prestige was on the line, committed to a production that might have been scripted by Cervantes and filmed by Disney.

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The advantage of a moon goal, the public was told then and still is told, was that it focused the tremendous inventive and productive potential of American technology on a clearly defined objective. It also—and this the public is not so often told— created a colossal politico-industrial pork barrel. The Houston case is an excellent example.

Houston is the center of manned space activity and home of the astronauts, not because of Lyndon Johnson, as is commonly supposed, but because of the late Albert Thomas. Thomas was chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee handling NASA's budget at the time of the May, 1961, moon message. He exacted a piece of the lunar action for Houston as his price for continued cooperation in funding Project Apollo. The apocryphal story is that Thomas told Webb, "the road to the moon lies through Houston," and Webb, a one-time business associate of that master politician, Robert Kerr of Oklahoma, heard and heeded.

From the outset, Apollo was conceived as a government-industry "team" effort, with the government pitching and industry catching the $20 billion or so it would cost to get men to the moon. Repeatedly in the early days of Apollo, Webb pointed out that "this money isn't being spent on the moon, but right here on earth—in the United States." About 90 per cent of NASA's $5 billion annual budget is spent outside the agency, chiefly in factories. Webb and his Associate Administrator for Manned Space Flight, George E. Mueller, like to point out that Apollo hardware contracts are to be found in every corner of the country and have given employment to something like 350,000 persons. Big names—GE, GM, Chrysler, Boeing, Douglas, North American, RCA, IBM—are part of the Apollo team; where a man's treasure lies, there is his heart also—and NASA has powerful friends in industry.

While it is possible, even practical, to turn on an effort of this scale at the whim of a President, it is not possible to turn it off as easily. NASA's powerful friends in industry have considerable clout on Capitol Hill, and the question, "after Apollo, what?," is being answered with a follow-on program of manned activities that will support the industrial team in the manner to which it has grown accustomed—that is to say, $4.5 billion to $5 billion a year. In authorizing recently a go-ahead on the NERVA atomic rocket project, President Johnson has opened the way for possible manned exploration of Mars. This is judged to be a $60 billion to $100 billion project that could take twenty or thirty years. Clearly the technological WPA is in business to stay.

That infinitely patient and ill-used animal, *Bos publicus*, in the six years since Apollo began, has been milked for something like $20 billion in furtherance of Kennedy's conceit that there was an "urgent national need" to send men to the moon before 1970. In all that time between the stanchions, bruised and abused by cold-fingered tax collectors, the public cow has never received a comprehensive, critical accounting of NASA's stewardship. Individual specialists, writing in individual newspapers, have tried to keep their readers abreast of developments, but these efforts have been spotty. The newsmagazine handling has been worse, and as far as *Life* and the TV networks are concerned, the space program is entertainment.

Bos publicus, fed on a silage of mulched press releases and activated astronaut memoirs, at first accepted the space effort for what, essentially, it was: an exciting and rather imaginative extravaganza. The program even produced a new breed of public figure, the Future Hero: the original seven astronauts, men of high celebrity from the date of their introduction twenty-five months before the first of them flew. They played with decent modesty and, for the most part, with grace the difficult role of hero-before-the-fact. The Gemini Nine and the Apollo Fourteen and the anonymous multitudes who have followed never really had the problems which perplexed the Mercury Seven.

At the time of Shepard's initial suborbital flight, the world marveled; people cheered as Glenn orbited the earth; they fell to their knees en masse in Grand Central Station and prayed when Carpenter overshot his splashdown point and was "lost" for fifty minutes in one of the sleaziest hoaxes ever perpetrated by a public relations man. But as time went on and success followed success, public interest in the program waned, as was proved on the night of the Gemini 8 crisis a year ago: outraged Batman fans jammed the switchboards of A.B.C. television affiliates, protesting the pre-emption of Batman's time for spot-news coverage of the Space Age's first legitimate orbital emergency.

When Armstrong and Scott got back safely that night and four more Gemini missions were flown without serious incident, public interest waned again. Despite clear warnings to the contrary, most people took at face value NASA's assurances that all was for the best in the best of all possible agencies, and that "zero defects" meant exactly what it said. So, unfortunately, did NASA take these assurances seriously, and here is the real tragedy of Pad 34. Deputy Space Administrator Robert C. Seamans' statement in his Third Interim Report last February 25—"Continued alertness to the possibility of fire had become dulled by previous ground experience and six years of successful manned missions"—is perhaps the most damning indictment of the Apollo program that could be made. It accords closely with Astronaut Training Chief "Deke" Slayton's charge that somebody's carelessness caused the death of his three friends.

Whose carelessness? Some worker's, perhaps, when he wired a cable up to the wrong terminal, or some quality control man's when he stamped his approval on work he did not witness, or some engineer's when he said: "Skip it; we won't run that part of the test." Possibly a case can be made along these lines, but the root cause of the accident lies far removed from the mechanic on the pad and much higher in the table of organization. As Admiral Rickover told the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy after the *Thresher* disaster: "If I have a job to do and it doesn't get done well, I am not going to blame the workmen."

It will be interesting in the coming weeks, as a Congressional committee strives to probe the Apollo tragedy, to see how NASA contrives to explain away the root cause of the fire that killed Grissom and White and Chaffee.

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POETS ON POETRY

Dead Horses and Live Issues

LOUIS SIMPSON
Mr. Simpson is the author of five books of poetry, among which Selected Poems *(Harcourt, Brace & World) won the Pulitzer Prize in 1964.*

In 1956, three writers met in a basement in Massachusetts and began putting together an anthology of contemporary verse. They thought of themselves as fair judges of American poetry, and one of them had an extensive knowledge of British poetry. However, though they did not know it, they were influenced by the *Zeitgeist*.

At that time the New Critics were still functioning, and many poets were writing in a manner that lent itself to so-called "close reading." Let us try to remember what New Criticism stood for: the poem treated as an object complete in itself; impersonality, a distance between the poet and the poem, use of a persona, irony, et cetera. On the other hand, at that time the counter-forces that have since come forward so powerfully had not begun to make themselves felt. Poets who were to become famous had not yet published a book; or if they had (Duncan), the book was not widely distributed. As the three editors turned over books and magazines, they did not discover, for example, Robert Duncan or Allen Ginsberg or Robert Creeley. These poets were then writing in a manner which, contrary to the New Criticism, stressed self-expression and took Pound and William Carlos Williams as models of rhythm and diction. But in 1956, Pound and Williams were not an "influence," at least not in New England, and their disciples were practically unknown.

When it came out the anthology was titled *The New Poets of England and America*. The definite article infuriated those poets who had been left out and, in 1960, another anthology appeared which was made on principles derived, more or less, from Pound and Williams. But there was a more urgent principle: to exclude all the poets who had been in the first anthology. This was *The New American Poetry*. There were several differences between the anthologies. Most of the New Poets were Easterners; some of the New American Poets were located in San Francisco. East was East and West was West. Also, in prose statements at the back of the book, the New American Poets cocked a snoot at the "Academy," meaning the ideas of people who taught for a living (the editors of the first anthology had committed that indiscretion). To offset some domestic and uxorious poetry in the first anthology, *The New American Poetry* offered a selection of wild men, the Beats.

It has been ten years since these anthologies so neatly divided all Gall into two parts. Since then, everything has changed, though this has not been noticed by some reviewers, those deceived husbands of fashion who are always the last to know. For one thing, several of the New American Poets who were so scornful of universities have become . . . professors of English. Indeed, the only thing that looks like an Establishment in American verse is the following commanded by Charles Olson, one of the poets in the second anthology. This school has a system of breathing and using the typewriter that will enable anyone to write poetry naturally, without thinking. I have met several young writers who hope by entering the school not only to write poems but also to find a job on graduation.

But schools of poetry are a contradiction in terms and cannot last. For poets, who really are, want poems above everything else and will recognize good work and condemn bad, even if the praise and condemnation are not in accordance with their own aesthetic, political or other interests. For a stunning example of this, see Pound's praise of Thomas Hardy, a poet of content and narrative power rather than style—praise that threatens to annihilate everything that Pound himself ever wrote. For a true poet, critical theory, and even friendship, must make way for the recognition of poetry when it appears, in whatever shape or voice.

Since the time of the anthologies there has been a general flight of poets of all kinds away from the sort of verse that the New Criticism was so well

LIONS COPULATING

We caught lions copulating on the plains
Of Africa. Our landrover closed in,
I pressed so hard on my 8 mm. color film
I almost lost this gigantic naturalism,

Trying to preserve it for my friends and astoundees.
But saw the King of Beasts with his head high,
His mane imperial, no expression on his face,
Prodding in and out of the great female

As if he were a schizophrenic dualist
And had to put up with his baser nature,
For his great face had no expression at all
While his lower being worked mechanical,

Then he fell away, and stood off, and lay
His full length on the ancient earth
While the lioness with a sumptuous gesture
Rolled over as I have seen other females do

In the perfect surfeit of her animal nature,
And took ease as if nobody were looking on,
And after an interval of valuable rest
These great beasts of the African wilds

Stood in their historic posture of superiority
And ambled across the limitless plains in silence
Without a thought of the lucubration of man,
Trying to signify their big natures in empathy.

RICHARD EBERHART

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equipped to deal with. Though poets have not agreed on what they want to write, they have been agreeing on what they do *not* want to write. They don't want to write Low Tide verse—about finding a dead fish at low tide; or the poem about the statues in the Villa Medici; or the well-rhymed poem about picking up the kid's busted tricycle and thinking of the death of Patroclus. In fact, they don't want to write any kind of rhymed poem. Repulsions held in common—that's what we find when we look at the work of American poets today. They don't want to write the so-called "well-made" poem that lends itself to the little knives and formaldehyde of a graduate school.

There is an accelerating movement away from rationalistic verse toward poetry that releases the unconscious, the irrational, or, if your mind runs that way, magic. Surrealism was buried by critics of the thirties and forties as somehow irrelevant; today it is one of the most commonly used techniques of verse. The change can be measured by comparing the reputation of W. H. Auden today with what it was twenty years ago. Auden was nothing if not rational. Reading an Auden poem today is a chilling experience. Talk about snows of yesteryear!

The general movement is such as I have indicated, but within it there are poets of all varieties, and their disagreements can be sharp. Though they are, in Melville's phrase, fleeing from all havens astern, this does not mean that they are sailing for the same ports ahead. I can see very little similarity between the aesthetic principles of James Wright and Allen Ginsberg, or Robert Creeley and W. S. Merwin, or Robert Bly and Gary Snyder. Yet if these people were asked what they *dislike*, I think there'd be a surprising amount of agreement.

One common revulsion has joined American poets, at least for a while, in the common enterprise of poetry readings and protests against the war in Vietnam. They are all—or nearly all—agreed to dislike it. The occasion has not produced much good poetry—occasions hardly ever do—but it may serve to change the poets profoundly, so that in the future their poems will be political in the way that really counts—that is, by altering the angle of vision. Political poetry need not be about a political occasion; it may be about a butterfly. A poor man does not see the same glass of wine that a rich man sees, and a poet who has been deeply affected by the war may never again see the objects around him in the way he used to. Many Americans are being changed by this experience—in spite of themselves, for the experience is painful.

Of course, there are exceptions. John Ashbery, in a recent article on another man's work, complimented him on not having written poetry about the war. This struck me as a new concept of merit—praising a man for things he has not written. But it was not amusing to see a poet sneering at the conscience of other poets. Some people seem able to protest only against an act of protest by others:

> *Cet animal est très méchant,*
> *Quand on l'attaque il se défend.*

I think one result of the war will be that American poets will have to take their vocation seriously, as Europeans have had to take it. They are being compelled to take *themselves* seriously; they are becoming an intelligentsia.

The movement to release the unconscious, and this new political awareness, will give rise, I believe, in the next ten years, to poetry of the vatic kind. Donne is out; Blake is in. Whitman, Pound of the *Cantos*, and foreign-language importations such as Neruda and Voznesensky, will be the models for young poets. At the same time, the gap between criticism and the art of poetry will grow even wider. Most critics were trained in the defunct Brooks-Warren method which didn't discuss, as I've said, anything but the poem-as-object. They have no language in which to treat the new poetry; indeed, it is increasingly obvious that they cannot see or hear, much less discuss it. New kinds of criticism will have to be developed in the coming years.

Whatever happens to poetry, we shall need poets to write it. Those who believe that poems will not have to be made, but will rise complete from the unconscious, and that the result will be poetry of a more valid and exciting kind, are having a fantasy with which poetry has little to do. We are in for some dreadful, bad writing . . . prose chopped into lines that look like verse . . . the outpourings of ignorance and vanity endlessly repeating themselves. We shall suffer through the Prophetic Book, the Whitman catalogue, the Adams *Canto*, written not by Blake , Whitman or Pound but by people without talent or humility. Yet, as we suffer these *longueurs*, let us remember, if we can, how trivial were the poems written under the direction of zanies who spoke of the "affective fallacy" as others might speak of the Whore of Babylon. And we can hope that a release of the unconscious and a larger range of concern in some poets will make for new work that has enthusiasm, imagination, vital rhythm and original form.

For want of a better word, I have spoken of surrealism. But this is misleading, especially if we think of Breton's brand of surrealism—automatic writing. I doubt that anyone would want this back. Opposing the exaggerations of rationalism, Breton laid down the dogma that only the irrational is poetic. But the mind cannot be divided into rational and irrational sections, and the attempt to divide it is—rationalism run mad. There is nothing drearier than "pure" surrealism, a spate of disconnected images.

Contrary to Breton, poetry represents not unreason but the total mind, including both reason and unreason. (In order to explain I must use this language.) Poetic creation has been described by some poets—Wordsworth and Keats come to mind—as a heightened state of consciousness brought about, curiously, by an infusion of the unconscious. See the "Ode to a Nightingale." The images are connected in a dream; and the deeper the dream, the stronger, the more logical, are the connections.

Dream is precisely what we do not find in the poetry of W. C. Williams, who is being much imitated nowadays. I agree that he wrote a number of excellent poems. He was a puritan, with limited imagination and a numbing self-consciousness, but he had a gift for description, for telling the facts in a flat style. His imitators are not likely to do as well; they have his flatness without his eye for significant detail. They are crippled by the doctrine of "sincerity," that is, reporting just the facts in a monotone, like Joe Friday. As for imagination—they are all puritans, unable to imagine any other life than their own. Among the followers of Williams there is more than ignorance; there is a fearful avoidance of thought. They do not read. They have not read Rilke, Yeats, Jimenez. They dare not read them. They could not bear the comparison.

My remarks are aimed at the school, not against Williams who wrote his poems and is honored for them. But, placed beside the *Duino Elegies* or the poems of Yeats, the poems of Williams are just good snapshots. (Having written this sentence, I remember seeing, the other day, a new book of poems in the manner of Williams. The poems are appended to and serve as comments upon a series of . . . photographs.)

It's no use talking about "American" rhythms, et cetera. It's no use saying that you write dully on purpose. To make out of Williams' poems a *mystique* of American style is to confuse writing poetry with the activity of a chamber of commerce. If we must look for native masters, there is more nourishment

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to be got from Whitman, Crane, Roethke, Stevens—though he is so mannered—and Pound—though sometimes he is incoherent—than from the dry, flat, painfully self-conscious lines of W. C. Williams.

I cannot end without quoting something. Here is a poem, "First Frost," by Andrei Voznesensky, translated by Stanley Kunitz:

A girl is freezing in a telephone booth,
huddled in her flimsy coat,
her face stained by tears
and smeared with lipstick.

She breathes on her thin little fingers.
Fingers like ice. Glass beads in her ears.

She has to beat her way back alone
down the icy street.

First frost. A beginning of losses.
The first frost of telephone phrases.

It is the start of winter glittering on
her cheek,
the first frost of having been hurt.

The "sincerity" of this should be pleasing to some of our younger American poets. But there is more involvement with the subject, and unashamed tenderness, than we get from our poets.

On Political Poetry

ROBERT BLY

Mr. Bly's book of poems, The Light Around the Body, *will be published by Harper & Row in August. The following essay, in somewhat longer form, will appear as the introduction to a book of poems to be published by The Sixties Press later this year, called* Forty Poems Touching on Recent American History.

Why have we had so few real political poems in the United States? American poets interested in politics (and most are) generally fall into one of two groups: the first group—we might take Lowell and Wilbur as examples—are occasionally brave in public statements, and their poetry has not the slightest political energy. Poets in the second group fill their poems with political language and then act like clowns. Poets like Gregory Corso make sure we understand they don't really mean it. In the United States, we have never developed a man like Pasternak, a man who wrote great poetry, who took a clear stand, and whose work itself has serious political meaning.

American society as a whole quite obviously tries to turn its artists and writers away from political content. Our wise men and wise institutions assure us that national political events are beyond the reach of ordinary, or even extraordinary, human sensitivity. As a result, a sort of husk has grown around the psyche of the nation.

Very few American poems penetrate to any reality in American political life. The truth is that most American poets do not bother to penetrate the husk around their own personalities, and therefore cannot penetrate the husk that has grown around the psyche of the country either. When a poet succeeds in driving inward, he develops new energy that carries him through the polished outside husk that deflects most meditation. Once inside the psyche, he can speak of inward and political things with the same assurance. Those poets who try to write political poems, without having developed any inwardness, have embarked on an impossible task. Paradoxically, what is needed to write true poems about the outward world is inwardness.

A good personal poem comes alive when the poet succeeds in carrying over some of his own psychic life into the poem, and entangling it in his language. The good political poem entangles in a similar way some of the psychic life of the nation.

The dominant poem in American literature however has always been the personal poem. John Crowe Ransom, for instance, wrote an elegant version of the personal poem, Yvor Winters a gnarled version of it, Randall Jarrell a flabby version, Robert Lowell a harsh version, Reed Whittemore a funny version, W. D. Snodgrass a whining version, Robert Creeley a laconic version, etc. I love the work of several of these poets, but one has to admit that they rarely escape from the purely personal poem. Some poets say flatly that they are "not political," and adopt the fiction that their psyches are unaffected by political climates. They secretly believe their psyches are like the psyche of a tree, which evidently grows as well in a Johnson Administration as in a Roosevelt administration. This assertion of independence for a man is a fiction.

The only political poetry that has been written with any determination in the United States were the poems written during the thirties by Edwin Rolfe, Sol Funaroff, Kenneth Faring and others of that group. It is interesting that their poems were usually political in *opinions.* For example, the poet might declare that he had discovered who the phonies in the world are, something he didn't know before. But changes of opinion are steps in the evolution of the poet's personality; they are steps in the poet's psychic *growth.* These "political" poems of the thirties then, like all poems of opinion, were not really political poems at all but personal poems appearing under another guise.

The life of the country can be imagined as a psyche larger than the psyche of anyone living, a larger sphere, floating above everyone. In order for the poet to write a true political poem, he has to be able to have such a grasp of his own concerns that he can leave them for a while, and then leap up, like a grasshopper, into this other psyche. In that sphere he finds strange plants and curious many-eyed creatures which he brings back with him. This half-visible psychic life he entangles in his language.

Some poets try to write political poems

THE BLUE SHUTTER

J'ai prononcé le mot réalité. Il faut encore bien s'entendre sur la signification de ce mot: ce n'est pas une fiction, c'est une réalité.—Père de Regnon

It opens, closes, opens and freezes
on the blue shutter, surging, hinge
and pine, against the stone walls and
spider lights of autumn. The eye dreams
in its sanctum of bone. The shutter
rumbles against the skull, swings inward
and halts against the bramble of the eye
like a hand holding in the dusk a shield
of hides. At the burning edge of the iris,
circling the heart, the shutter opens
like a leaf fallen on the edge of bright water.

NED O'GORMAN

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impelled upward by hatred or fear. But those emotions are stiff jointed, rock-like, and are seldom able to escape from the gravity of the body. What the poet needs to get up that far and bring back something are great leaps of the imagination.

A true political poem is a quarrel with ourselves, as a personal poem is, and rhetoric is as pointless in that sort of poem as in the personal one. The true political poem does not order us either to take any specific act; like the personal poem, it moves to deepen awareness.

Thinking of the rarity of the political poem in the United States, another image comes to mind. We can imagine Americans inside a sphere, like those sad men in Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights." The clear glass is the limit of the ego. We float inside it. Around us there are worlds of energy, but we are unable to describe them in words because we are unable to get out of our own egos.

Yeats and Neruda seem to me to have written the greatest political poetry of this century so far. We know Yeats's poems fairly well; let me quote a poem of Neruda's called "The Dictators," which I think is a masterpiece of the political poem. (The translation is my own.)

An odor has remained among the sugar cane:
A mixture of blood and body, a penetrating
Petal that brings nausea.
Between the coconut palms the graves are full
Of ruined bones, of speechless death-rattles.
A delicate underling converses
With glasses, braid collars, and cords of gold.
The tiny palace gleams like a watch
And the rapid laughs with gloves on
Cross the corridors at times
And join the dead voices
And the blue mouths freshly buried.
The weeping is hidden like a water-plant
Whose seeds fall constantly on the earth
And without light make the great blind leaves to grow.
Hatred has grown scale upon scale,
Blow on blow, in the ghastly water of the swamp,
With a snout full of ooze and silence.

The poem's task is to entangle in the language the psychic landscape of a South American country under a dictator. The Spanish original, of course, is much more resonant. But even in the translation it is clear that Neruda is bringing in unexpected images: "The tiny palace gleams like a watch"—images one would expect in an entirely different sort of poem: "rapid laughs with gloves on." Suddenly a blind plant appears, that reproduces itself by dropping seeds constantly on the ground, shaded by its own huge leaves. This image is complicated, created by a part of the mind inaccessible to hatred, and yet it carries the reality of hatred radiating from dictators into the consciousness with a kind of massive intelligence. Describing dictators in "The United Fruit Company," Neruda uses for them the image of ordinary houseflies. By contrast, the journalistic mind would tend to describe them as huge and cunning.

Whitman was the first true political poet we had in North America. Surely his short poem, "To the States" is also a masterpiece of the political poem:

To Identify the 16th, 17th or 18th Presidentiad:

Why reclining, interrogating? why myself and all drowsing?
What deepening twilight — scum floating atop the waters,
Who are they as bats and night-dogs askant in the capitol:
What a filthy Presidentiad! (O South, your torrid suns! O North, your arctic freezings!)
Are those really congressmen? are those the great Judges? is that the President?
Then I will sleep awhile yet, for I see that these States sleep, for reasons;
(With gathering murk, with muttering thunder and lambent shoots we all duly awake,
South, North, East, West, inland and seaboard, we will surely awake.)

William Vaughn Moody wrote some fine lines in 1898:

Was it for this our fathers kept the law?
This crown shall crown their struggle and their ruth?
Are we the eagle nation Milton saw
Mewing its mighty youth,
Soon to possess the mountain winds of truth,
And be swift familiar of the sun
Where aye before God's face his trumpets run?
Or have we but the talons and the maw,
And for the abject likeness of our heart
Shall some less lordly bird be set apart?
Some gross-billed wader where the swamps are fat?
Some gorger in the sun? Some prowler with the bat?

His poem was written against United States policy for the first time we invaded Cuba. The language at times is remarkably swift and intense, particularly when compared to the hopelessly foggy language of political poetry being written by others at that time.

In the last thirty years, few American poets have had any sense of a nation beyond their own ego. Two of the

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exceptions are Kenneth Rexroth and Thomas McGrath. In his "Ode for the American Dead in Korea," Thomas McGrath wrote:

And God (whose sparrows fall aslant his gaze,
Like grace or confetti) blinks and he is gone,
And you are gone. . . . But, in another year
We will mourn you, whose fossil courage fills
The limestone histories: brave: ignorant: amazed:
Dead in the rice paddies, dead on the nameless hills.

Rexroth has written beautiful poems touching on life outside our egos, among them "A Christmas Note for Geraldine Udell":

I think of you in Gas,
The heroine on the eve of explosion;
Or angry, white, and still,
Arguing with me about Sasha's tragic book . . .
I light the lamp and hunt for pad and pencil,
A million sleepers turn,
While bombs fall in their dreams. The storm goes away,
Muttering in the hills.
The veering wind brings the cold, organic smell
Of the flowing ocean.

More recently, Robert Duncan has written a number of powerful poems on the Vietnamese War.

America needs political poetry now, so it can see what is happening. And the younger poets are beginning to write it. America is still young itself, and it may become something magnificent and shining, or it may turn, as Rome did, into a black dinosaur, the enemy of every nation in the world that wants to live its own life. In my opinion, that decision has not yet been made.

Performance Without a Net

STEPHEN KOCH
Mr. Koch teaches at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

A legitimate *avant-garde* guards nothing, least of all itself. Its animating ethic is risk, and the rewards given to it are particularly glittering because its daredevils risk the whole show—if they fail, they produce something less than bad conventional art, and take the plunge into sub-rubbish, into nothing at all. But whether the act is good or bad, it must be performed without the net.

Except that art is not a circus. In its realm, the daredevil's dive takes the sober form of a question asked by any artist who has made something new: "What is art? I have an imagination. What should I be doing with it *now*?" At the moment there are three energetic schools of *avant-garde* poetry—labeled with such catch phrases as "City Lights," "The New York School" and (clumsiest of all) "Olson-Duncan-Creeley"—carrying out this interrogation.

The City Lights group, presided over by Lawrence Ferlinghetti and composed of the fathers and children of the so-called San Francisco Renaissance, is the most programmatically and stridently *avant-gardiste* of the three for the paradoxical reason that they adopt the classical *avant*-postures with least modification and the least that is new—though the old is frequently watered down or vulgarized. Though Gary Snyder and Philip Whalen are primarily interested in modes of contemplative expression derived from Oriental religion (especially Zen Buddhism), others of the group are concerned with using poetry in acts of liberation and revolt. Its driving energy is the energy of classical *ressentiment* against the middle class and the forces of repression; it talks very dirty and its images are as explosive as possible; the group seems happiest when in trouble with the law.

The neo-surrealist wing, which includes Ferlinghetti himself, Michael McClure and Phillip Lamantia creates its work in the light of a metaphor adopted from French radical politics: in their minds the ideas of liberty and revolution are absolutely fused and have no independent meaning: they see themselves as the *sans culottes* of the spirit. True enough, Ferlinghetti's work is rather dulcet: he writes sentimental hymns to love and "the rebirth of wonder," but the standard fare in his magazine, *City Lights Journal*, construes art as a form of assault or a means for personal release from the psychological blocks and evaporations and freeze-ups that keep the poet from being fully himself. But whether the revolution is private or directed against the suffocating, obscene, lily-livered bourgeoisie, the imagery is generally derived—however remotely—from the Reign of Terror.

These artists' involvement in and understanding of politics is characteristically very slight because, like many revolutionaries, they are much less interested in politics than in the apocalypse. Whether it is the quasi-political eruptions of Ferlinghetti or the convulsions—simultaneously supercharged and banal, anguished and breezy—of Michael McClure, the dream of apocalypse alone leads them to poetry.

Like their mentors—Antonin Artaud, Pollock, Whitman, Sade, many Surrealists, among others—these poets make their governing metaphors as radical as possible: their terms are the Self and the World; Freedom and Bondage; the will and the conditions of reality. Potentially, this gives their work the greatest possible interest, but a metaphor must succeed, however radical and open-ended it may be, and it must succeed in aesthetic terms. Even when it does, someone must ask what might be the nature and value of liberty found only in metaphor. So far as I know, nobody at City Lights has had the wit or diligence to deal with such a question adequately, with the result that the work is—when it is not trash—pale and incomplete. McClure, I should add, disclaims any intention to shock others into Freedom.

The work of the remarkable Robert Duncan (who was also among the founders of the San Francisco Renaissance) is in an entirely different class. He has published ten books, most notably the *Letters, Selected Poems, Roots and Branches* and *The Opening of the Field*. His work is not based on the naive revolutionary metaphor that nourishes the City Lights group; instead he joins Charles Olson (whose most important book is *The Maximus Poems*) and Robert Creeley (*For Love* and the recently published *Words*) in a concern with the process of the poem's development and creation; with alternations of voice and rhetoric, and with the linear development of metaphoric time—concerns which Olson derives from the glamorous example of Pound's *Cantos* with their potentially interminable sequence and their radical revisions of poetic logic and structure, their intuitively jointed swing across language. Almost every page of Duncan manifests these concerns:

Glare-eyed challenger! serpent-skin coated
Accumulus of days!
Swung in your arms, I grow old.

The numbers swing me. The days that count
my dervish invisible that time is
Up—My time is up?

Period by period the sentences are bound.

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Here words like "swing" and "time" introduce new variations on the voice, new inflections picked up in the next usage, "swinging" from the charged "mythic" opening tones to the banal, questioning, "My time is up?" And the poem reflects on its own structural procedure in the line "Period by period the sentences are bound."

Though classed with them, Duncan seems to me a much more considerable figure than either Olson or Creeley. Their obsessive—almost exclusive—concern with vocal structure and tonality leads them to exclude from their work any appeal to the eye—or to any other sense for that matter. A prolonged bout of reading either one—particularly Olson—is likely to leave the reader feeling he suffers from an acute case of sensory deprivation. Whatever their other interest, Olson's poems are as flat and gray as the Massachusetts landscape in which they are often located, and they drain the eye into the same visual vacuum. Duncan's work is much more sensual, and unlike Olson and Creeley, he is willing to be quite self-consciously "literary"—his vocabulary, a vast composite anthology drawn from Renaissance poetry to the language of myth, is easily the most "conventional" of any practicing poet of importance, so that his rhetoric is much more varied and full-blooded than the rather anemic, strictly American voices of Olson and Creeley. It can be argued, of course, that Duncan's "literary" rhetoric is a limitation on his modernism. He seems unaware that Apollinaire ever lived, and he seems to hold the commonplace in almost 18th-century contempt.

Finally, Duncan's poetic intentions are much more exalted than those of his contemporaries. In an introduction to his early poems, recently republished under the new title *The Years as Catches*, Duncan mentions an early homosexual love affair, and remarks of his subsequent poetic development:

> Perhaps the sexual irregularity underlay and led to the poetic; neither as homosexual nor as poet could one take over readily the accepted paradigms and conventions of the Protestant ethic. The structure of my life like the structure of my work was to emerge in a series of trials, a problematic identity. A magpie's nest or collage, a construct of disparate elements drawn into the play they have excited, a syncretic religion. Often only the complex pun could hold the variety needed to assert the Real felt in the unity that excited.

This grammatically tortured remark explains Duncan's lofty rhetoric and the peculiarly anachronistic way he has greeted the triumph of secularism. Driven by a scattered sense of self and his sexual nonconformism, he has erected a private poetic structure from the language of myth and penance and prophecy: he is the prophet of himself, the high priest of a revelation which he himself both creates and witnesses. Duncan is without doubt the most solemn poet going; an Isaiah singing out a Book—made up of everything from Milton to the kitchen sink—to an unknown God which the song itself creates by autosuggestion.

The prophecy has a limitation, however: the God thus miraculously raised into Being flickers out of existence the moment the book is closed. Though I see no objection to the artificial quality of Duncan's devotional temperament, the high solemnity of his rhetoric and the sonorous seriousness with which he takes his own role as poet frequently put an unbearable burden on the slender substance of his Devotional Being. Duncan is freshest and strongest in his less ambitious work; and his occasional forays into the realm of allegory—as in his verse play, *Adam's Curse*—can result in failure.

His religious temperament functions by producing works of brilliance—he is unquestionably one of the most intelligent poets alive. But it also functions

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI. *Pictures of the Gone World* (City Lights); *The Coney Island of the Mind*; *Starting from San Francisco*; *Unfair Arguments With Existence*; *Routines* (all New Directions).

GARY SNYDER. *Myths and Texts* (Citadel Press); *Riprap* (Origin Press).

PHILIP WHALEN. *Like I Say* (Citadel Press); *Memories of an Interglacial Age* (Auerhahn Press).

MICHAEL MCCLURE. *Meat Science Essays* (City Lights). *The New Book/A Book of Torture* (Grove Press).

PHILLIP LAMANTIA. *Destroyed Works* (Auerhahn Press).

ROBERT DUNCAN. *Selected Poems* (City Lights); *The Opening of the Field* (Grove Press); *Roots and Branches* (Charles Scribner's Sons).

CHARLES OLSON. *Maximus Poems* (Citadel Press).

ROBERT CREELEY. *For Love* and *Words* (both Charles Scribner's Sons).

KENNETH KOCH. *Poems* (Tibor de Nagy Editions). *Thank You*; *Ko, Or a Season on Earth*; *Bertha and Other Plays* (all Grove Press).

JOHN ASHBERY. *Rivers and Mountains* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston).

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CHARLESTON IN THE 1860s

(derived from the diaries of Mary Boykin Chesnut)

He seized me round the waist and kissed my throat . . .
Your eyes, dear, are they grey or blue,
eyes of an angel?
The carts have passed already with their heaped
night-soil, we breathe again.
Is this what war is? Nitrate . . .
But smell the pear,
the jasmine, the violets.
Why does this landscape always sadden you?
Now the freshet is up on every side,
the river comes to our doors,
limbs of primeval trees dip in the swamp.

So we fool on into the black
cloud ahead of us.
Everything human glitters fever-bright,
the thrill of waking up
out of a stagnant life?
There seems a spell upon
your lovers — all dead of wounds
or blown to pieces . . . Nitrate!
I'm writing blind with tears of rage.
In vain. Years, death, depopulation, fears,
bondage: these shall all be borne.
No imagination to forestall woe.

ADRIENNE RICH

in a religious void; the devotional temperament, whether it worships religious language (as Duncan seems to) or religious beings, is alien to the secular age in which we live; and Duncan's works cut off our imaginative awareness at the same time as they open it. They embody a notion of what it means to be serious as a man that the era does not and cannot support, with the result that they are hounded by anachronistic ultimates: they seem simultaneously heroic and irrelevant.

This leaves us with Mere Art and the New York School—a jump across the continental divide from ritual to wit, from the religious sensibility *manqué* to the strictly secular sensibility playing with and extending its art. Historically speaking, this school is attempting to arbitrate the symbolist and surrealist aesthetic in a way that parallels the work of some contemporary French figures such as Francis Ponge and Denis Roche, as well as Paul Celan in Germany; these poets—John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch and the late Frank O'Hara—are interested in exploiting the capacities of the senses without any transcendent aim. Inevitably, supporters of Duncan accuse the school of superficiality.

The New York School is greatly indebted to Surrealism; but it has moved beyond the City Lights group to revise the revolutionary surrealist metaphor and return it to the complex confines of art, from which it originally exploded. Ashbery and Koch are aware that language is better able to traffic in the impossible than any other medium (partly because it so largely defines our sense of the possible), but that its sensory appeal is much less direct than that of the plastic arts, music, film or drama. They compensate for this fade-out of the printed word by exploiting the lushness of dissociation, leaping fantasy and surprise as fully as possible. Particularly in Koch's hands, this kind of graciously jumpy procedure has been given encyclopedic exploration in his work: (*Poems, Permanently,* and *Thank You*); in a mock epic poem "Ko," and in the delightful collection *Bertha, and Other Plays.* (Several chapters of a novel also have appeared in magazines.) Koch must be accounted the freshest and most polished literary wit now writing—as well as an "influence" whose workshops at the New School for Social Research opened the way to a new kind of poetic practice, giving direction to some of the most promising younger poets we have. I am thinking particularly of John Perreault and David Shapiro, who in their different ways have developed the master's lesson and shown it to be more than a mere method, but a true poetic—quivering, as Breton said, with a sense of the future.

Koch's energy is exemplary, and so is his movement out of the form of the traditional lyric poem into narratives and drama. "Ko"—a book-length narrative (115 pages) about a Japanese baseball player who bounces around the world like a TV beam from some whirling satellite—is a parody that returns storytelling to the methods of poetry, while the surrealistic comedy of *Bertha*—and the other plays, like *The Return of Yellowmay*— makes the fundamental theatricality of Koch's whole poetic approach explicit.

John Ashbery's poetry differs from Koch's by being on the surface much more serious and at the same time much less coherent. The audience at one of Koch's readings ends laughing, while Ashbery's audience is more likely to be bluntly bewildered, wondering quite literally what goes on. Ashbery's work embodies sensory elements in which Koch appears to have little or no interest, the most important of which is *time*. Significantly, Koch wrote "Ko" quite early in his career, while for years Ashbery has been trying without success to write a long poem, to succeed only with the extraordinary "The Skaters," included in his latest book, *Rivers and Mountains.* Ashbery is concerned with the imaginative problem of embodying poetic time, and while Koch could write his long poem by resorting to the simple expedient of telling a story in the most disconnected way he could (and still tell it), Ashbery confronts vastly more difficult and exciting problems of scale and dynamics.

Although John Ashbery is an art critic, I suspect that the art (other than poetry) which interests him most is music, the only other art that deals with temporal elements in the way he aspires to do. It is no accident that Ashbery is the modern poet who shows the influence of John Cage, particularly in his earlier poems. If one is looking for analogies to the other arts, it is Koch's work that most resembles painting, since his methods of disjunction and collage show no particular attention to the artistic problem of linear time.

As the three schools make clear, the old cliché, "very interesting, but is it art," masks and evades questions of liberty and revelation, of the stature and viability of art in a secular age. Such questions could scarcely be more commanding, but in this context they command only to the degree that the work captures the imagination as art. Is this mere intellectualism? Or mere aestheticism? The two cannot be separated. Insofar as he has been captured, the reader is the captive who learns and wins.

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Response to a War

WHERE IS VIETNAM? American Poets Respond. *Edited by Walter Lowenfels. A Doubleday Anchor Original. 160 pp. $1.25 paper.*

WENDELL BERRY
Mr. Berry is a poet now living in Kentucky. His latest book is The Broken Ground *(Harcourt, Brace & World).*

American writers have often longed for the peaceful contemplative life, and so they have often been painfully aware of distractions. They have felt tearing in themselves the rift between private peace and public trouble. Thoreau wrote: ". . . I endeavor in vain to observe nature; my thoughts involuntarily go plotting against the State. I trust that all just men will conspire." And Mark Twain sent Huck down the Mississippi in what has become the definitive American idyl, giving him for companion Nigger Jim, whose condition was the whole nation's shame and agony.

Not long ago most poets in this country were confidently promoting the specialization of their art. Young poets who began writing in the fifties were more than likely to gather from their elders that the poet's obligation was to poetry and to his language. Other concerns were for other specialists. But within the last three and a half years there has been a turn around. It began, I think, with the poems written on the assassination of President Kennedy; for the first time in maybe a century American poets wrote public poems—poems about a public happening, written out of feelings that the poets had in common, then, with most of the people in the country.

The assassination poems were almost inadvertent. They didn't come out of any formed intention, much less any formed sense of public responsibility. But they must have suggested the possibility of a public role for poetry, which has now been deliberately assumed by many poets, all over the country, in response to our war in Vietnam. This new anthology, *Where Is Vietnam?*, contains the work of eighty-seven poets, a considerable number, though by no means all who have written and publicly read poems in protest against this war. It appears safe to say that nearly all of our poets are party to this protest. I know of a few who hold to the notion that poetry has no business in politics, but I know of no pro-Johnson poem.

There is no mystery at the source of these poems. It is an agony of a kind that probably has not been felt so deeply by so many people in America before. Most American poets, like most Americans, have been taught from infancy that in a democratic country individuals are responsible for the actions of their government. And now they find themselves "represented" by a government that many of them helped elect on its promise not to do what it is doing, a government that in the name of democracy and brotherhood has made itself a tyrant and a scourge. They feel responsible for what they can neither approve nor control. They know that their country is determining the future of the world by the quirks of hypocrisy. They think of the *people* of Vietnam—the old people, the husbands and wives, the children—who are being dispossessed, scattered, maimed, burned alive, *by us*, for nothing they have ever done wrong.

The first poem in this anthology is by the Vietnamese poet, Nhat Hanh, a lament for the destruction of his country, "our dear green garden":

O terrible winds that blow from the ends of the earth
To hurl down our houses and blast our fertile fields!
I say farewell to the blazing blackening place where I was born.

And the rest of the book can be read as a response. Maybe a representative voice is that of the person "who once was a teacher in Asia," in the poem by Evelyn Thorne:

Here between the hills and the Hudson
autumn comes in a rage of gold. I walk in a shower
of midas leaves, and the smell of frost.
and I find myself being happy. Then great God
I remember. Over there in a land I love
the beautiful people are being murdered,
the courteous brown people who move with the grace of deer, and speak softly.
And I live here, in the land of the murderer.

This strikes me as a desperate book. It would help to be able to believe that poets are unacknowledged legislators, or that they serve as the conscience of their race. But who knows? And who can help doubting? There are respected politicians and generals whose protests against this war have been ignored. In terms of effect, then, do these poems really represent the exercise of a public responsibility, or are they doomed to be only private gestures of expiation or repudia-

---

THE WRECK

The Church, like a wreck blown ashore
from the Middle Ages,
battering on a shoal at Finisterre . . .

The seams have opened,
and the sea, like a luminous window
falling away, flashes briefly
with ikons, chalices, gold candlesticks.

Angels and saints, their faces
crusted with salt,
draw near to the flooded railing.
They try to sing — the wind,
full of a wintry fervor,
whips the kyries from broken spars.

And the figurehead on a cross
has never moved . . .

a conch mourns in the littered shallows;
unwieldy shapes, driftwood and sea-coal,
groan and struggle to their feet,
survivors from a shipwreck of souls.

JOHN HAINES

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tion? I don't know, but the question worries me.

This collection suggests that poets have begun again to want a public or political role—or at least that poets, as thoughtful and responsible-feeling persons, are finding themselves unable to refuse such a role. But I think that this will not amount to very much unless our poetry develops the ability to do more than protest. The poets in this volume very movingly, and often very competently, condemn the way things are, but they never do this, it seems to me, by the standard of any coherent vision of how things ought to be. Their impulse is mainly negative. *The Waste Land* still exemplifies the powers and the limits of most of our poetry. When we want to despise or condemn what is going on, we hark back to some "good" time in the past, juxtapose selected evils of our own time, and note the discrepancies. That, it must be said, is easy to do, and it is becoming utterly useless. The poems in *Where Is Vietnam?* are so locked in their horror of the present that they can hardly look even backward, but they are locked in this horror partly because their inheritance has not equipped them to imagine anything in the other direction.

In the long run, this protesting will be as negligible as the merest fashion if it doesn't produce a full realization of how the war grows out of what is corrupt and false in our life; and that realization will come to nothing if it doesn't produce a believable vision of a better life that is possible for us. Without this, protest is little more than wishful thinking, as futile as wishing that we had been born in the good old days.

We need a vision of a national life in which efficiency is not the highest good, and of a governmental consciousness of life that can include and control the consciousness of power. We need to be able to feel that all problems cannot be solved by power or by technology. We probably have the necessary *ideas* already, but their application to our time and our troubles will have to be imagined. To have any life or any appeal or any effect, the ideas not only will have to be thought about and assented to but their possibility will have to be foreseen in the lives of people. This is the vision we don't have. The lack of it makes the desperation of this book of poems, and of the war it was made to oppose, and of the society that can find no alternative to the war.

Translations of Anna Akhmatova (1888-1966)

STANLEY KUNITZ
Mr. Kunitz is currently visiting the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries under the cultural exchange agreement. In the preparation of these translations from the Russian, Mr. Kunitz has worked closely with Max Hayward with whom he is collaborating on *The Selected Poetry of Anna Akhmatova*, to be published next year by Macmillan. Like that of her contemporaries, Mandelstam, Pasternak and Cvetaeva, Akhmatova's work is an important influence on the new Russian Poets. Mr. Kunitz's *Selected Poems* (Little, Brown) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1959.

READING HAMLET

A barren patch to the right of the cemetery,
Behind it a river flashing blue.
You said: "All right then, get thee to a nunnery,
Or go get married to a fool. . ."

It was the sort of thing that princes always say,
But these are words that one remembers.
May they flow a hundred centuries in a row
Like an ermine mantle from his shoulders.

Kiev, 1909

JULY 1914

I.

All month a smell of burning, of dry peat
Smouldering in the bogs.
Even the birds have stopped singing,
The aspen does not tremble.

The god of wrath glares in the sky,
The fields have been parched since Easter.
A one-legged pilgrim stood in the yard
With his mouth full of prophecies:

"Beware of terrible times . . . the earth
Opening for a crowd of corpses.
Expect famine, earthquakes, plague,
And heavens darkened by eclipses.

"But our land will not be divided
By the enemy at his pleasure;
The Mother-of-God will spread
A white shroud over these great sorrows."

II.

From the burning woods drifts
The sweet smell of juniper.
Widows grieve over their brood,
The village rings with their lamentation.

If the land thirsted, it was not in vain,
Nor were the prayers wasted;
For a warm red rain soaks
The trampled fields.

Low, low hangs the empty sky,
Tender is the voice of the supplicant:
"They wound Thy most holy body,
They are casting lots for Thy garments."

Slepnevo, 1914

'HEART'S MEMORY OF SUN . . .'

Heart's memory of sun grows fainter,
Sallow is the grass,
A few flakes toss in the wind
Scarcely, scarcely.

The narrow canals no longer flow,
They are frozen over.
Nothing will ever happen here,
Oh, never!

In the bleak sky the willow spreads
Its bare-boned fan.
Maybe I'm better off as I am,
Not as your wife.

Heart's memory of sun grows fainter.
What's this? Darkness?
Perhaps! This very night will bring
The winter.

1911

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Inventing the American Heart

POEMS 1957-1967. *By James Dickey. Wesleyan University Press. 299 pp. $6.95.*

MICHAEL GOLDMAN
Mr. Goldman, poetry editor of The Nation, *is the author of* First Poems *(Macmillan). He teaches at Columbia University.*

One of the things we should mean when we call a poet "good" is that his work returns us to the world and not merely to the poet. We do not assimilate good poetry; we become included in its imagination. James Dickey is a good poet, very good. The appearance of this volume, containing most of his four previous books and a substantial amount of new work, makes it clear that by a continuing act of the imagination Dickey has penetrated a large and unfamiliar portion of the world. The life he establishes is fearful, often inhuman, but it is necessary because in it we recognize ourselves. He lifts something out of our experience that our mind has not yet been able to play upon, and frees us to encounter it.

Dickey's poems are remarkable for imagination, in the most literal sense, for their power of grasping and making images. But these are not the "images" the tradition of poetry has taught us to expect. They are neither minute visual notations nor elaborately constructed symbols. Here is the beginning of "A Screened Porch in the Country":

> *All of them are sitting*
> *Inside a lamp of coarse wire*
> *And being in all directions*
> *Shed upon darkness*

This is more than a type of high wit, more than a strikingly accurate piece of description. Dickey gives the moment a natural energy, not the energy of the poet's insistence upon his own personality but the energy of a vast life outside the poet which moves all things through one another and through him.

For many poets the image is a form of self-projection, a personal signature that they inscribe upon experience. For others it is a kind of affectionate clarity, a loving selective focus. But Dickey incorporates everything he sees into an image that is in motion, a momentarily complete environment flexing and warm like living tissue, within which he moves. It is as if the world about him became an animal, and he entered its body.

In "Cherrylog Road," the poet remembers how as a young man he made his way to a rendezvous through the abandoned hulks of an automobile graveyard. He goes from a Ford to an Essex to a Chevrolet:

> *None had the same body heat*
> *I changed with them inward, toward*
> *The weedy heart of the junkyard*

His images are bodies within which he changes, moving toward a heart which is not his heart but a heart of experience—an animal center, usually dangerous. He moves mainly by water in the earliest poems, which are somewhat diffuse and "romantic" in aura, and in the very latest poems he seems increasingly concerned with movement through the air, but the movement is always into a realm where animal powers lurk, foxes or snakes or enemies, where the explorer becomes his exploration and the hunter puts on his victim's skin. Dickey returns again and again to the figure of a man putting on someone else's body, a hollowed-out boar's head, a suit of armor, a dead man's helmet. Even the spurs of the "Power and Light" man are like a gamecock's spurs; and of course the hero of this poem takes on power from the wires to which he climbs:

> *flung up on towers*
> *walking*
> *Over mountains my charged hair*
> *standing on end crossing*
> *The sickled, slaughtered alleys of timber*
> *Where the lines loop and crackle on*
> *their gallows.*

And when the power and light man comes home and shuts himself in his basement to drink he feels a similar energy coming at him through the ground:

> *. . . in the deep sway of under-*
> *ground among the roots*
> *That bend like branches all things*
> *connect and stream*
> *Toward light and speech tingle rock*
> *like a powerline in wind,*
> *Like a man working, drunk of*
> *pine-moves the sun in the socket*
> *Of his shoulder . . .*
> *Far under the grass of my grave, I drink*
> *like a man*
>
> *The night before*
> *Resurrection Day.*

For Dickey, an image is like a special kind of clothing, a charged shape of the outside world that he puts on, in order to connect himself to the world's monstrous power.

The last section of the book is devoted to poems written since *Buckdancer's Choice* (which a year ago won the National Book Award), and here Dickey seems to confront the monstrous even more directly. There are a number of magnificent poems (particularly

He wants her to take him back.

How we saw "Red"

AMERICANS AND THE SOVIET EXPERIMENT 1917-1933

By Peter G. Filene

In the sixteen eventful years between the Bolshevik February Revolution and Roosevelt's recognition of the Soviet regime, Americans viewed the "Red experiment" with mixed emotions. By turns confused, fearful, fascinated, agitated, curious, complacent, anxious, admiring, outraged, even envious and hysterical—but never bored—businessmen and educators, clergymen and labor leaders, reactionaries and radicals compared and contrasted American and Russian achievements. In a constantly engrossing story, Mr. Filene uncovers much about how attitudes are formed and how they produce opinions, and about how Americans saw—and see—democracy, capitalism, and themselves. Illustrated. $7.95

ALIENS AND DISSENTERS: *Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933.* William Preston, Jr. Foreword by Oscar Handlin. "Important . . . focuses attention on an antidemocratic tradition that many complacent Americans tend to overlook . . . a standard work in the history of civil rights." — *American Historical Review.* Center for the Study of the History of Liberty in America. $6.75

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"Sustainment," "The Head-Aim," as well as "Power and Light"), and in most of them, some inhuman power possesses the human body. "The Head-Aim" discusses how to be an animal:

You must throw your arms
Like broken sticks into the alder creek
And learn to aim the head.
. . . This is the whole secret of being
Inhuman.

"The Sheep-Child" is about the legendary offspring of a farm boy and a sheep; the bulk of the poem is devoted to a speech by this "woolly baby" supposedly "pickled in alcohol" in a museum in Atlanta. Like many of the poems it is also concerned with the values that may rise out of our experience of the inhuman. The sheep-child says of the farm boys:

Dreaming of me,
They groan they wait they suffer
Themselves, they marry, they raise their kind.

Dickey attempts a more encouraging conclusion, with less success, in "Falling," a poem about a stewardess who falls to her death from an airliner. It seizes its subject brilliantly and characteristically:

As though she blew
The door down with a silent blast from her lungs . . .
. . . falling living beginning to be something
That no one has ever been and lived through

But at the end as the girl lies with a broken back in a Kansas field, Dickey tries to assert a positive value for the experience. She

Feels herself go go toward go outward breathes at last fully
Not and tries less once tries
tries AH, GOD —

By and large, Dickey is more convincing at terror than exaltation, but terror—as opposed to the nervous irritation for which so much of our poetry settles—is a rare thing in poetry, and it clears the heart.

A special quality in these poems—at least for another poet—is Dickey's surrender to his scenes. Today, poets frequently write about their surrenders—to pain, madness, drugs, anger, sex, nirvana—but their surrenders so often turn out to be seizures, spasms of the nerves and of the will. Dickey, "self-possessed in self-surrender," allows himself to register fully the terrible life that flows between the self and the world. He knows the world is the bigger of the two and that the self grows by exposure to it. It is his sense of the threat and alluring power of the world, which is also the threat and alluring power of the self, that governs his imagination and gives it a fearful energy. When he writes about a girl hideously scarred by windshield glass in an automobile accident he begins:

All glass may yet be whole
She thinks, it may be put together
From the deep inner flashing of her face.

And in the opening lines of "The Ice Skin," he seems to be describing the very process of tragedy:

All things that go deep enough
Into rain and cold
Take on, before they break down
A shining in every part.
The necks of slender trees
Reel under it, too much crowned,
Like princes dressing as kings.

And the redwoods let sink their branches
Like arms that try to hold buckets
Filling slowly with diamonds
Until a cannon goes off
Somewhere inside the still trunk
And a limb breaks, just before midnight,
Plunging houses into the darkness
And hands into cupboards, all seeking
Candles, and finding each other.
There is this skin

Always waiting in cold-enough air.

This succeeds not because the poet has tried to come up with an arresting string of symbols for tragedy, but because through his imagination he has included himself in tragic life.

In Dickey's poems there is very little of that secret dialogue among words, the sense of "words talking among themselves" that Auden refers to, which is the usual source of root vitality in poetry. His secret dialogue is among images—they flow into and transform one another, breaking out of the literal pattern and insisting on their own visionary, contrapuntal life.

Verbally, Dickey has all the breath he needs; his language is never exhausted and seldom inexact. Yet it remains true that what I have called the secret dialogue among words is a characteristic of the greatest poetry: every word infects every other word, impregnates every other word, bites every other word, makes a flesh with every other word—and it is this verbal power which, till now, has not been markedly present in Dickey's work. Now this is an *ultimate* power, very rare in its true form. It should not be confused with the mere appearance of verbal power, which may be contrived by any poet who is willing to devote his career to never taking risks. It has nothing to do with what reviewers call "the distinctive voice." We praise a poet for having a distinctive voice only when there is nothing else distinctive about him. Some poets may give us a svelte stuffed animal, but Dickey gives us the living mouth and lung and claw. And when his language takes on its own animal life, while still remaining transparent to the life of its images, we have a poetry that no active poet has bettered:

and wandered the lane of water
Upstream and home,
His bridle dragging, his saddle
Maniacally wrenched, stopping often to drink
Entirely, his eyes receiving bright pebbles,
His head in his own image where it flowed.

Dickey's strangeness is peculiarly American (though I suspect that in the next few years it will prove very successful with foreign audiences). The "natural world" of America is very different from the natural world of, say, England, and yet when American poets come to write about nature, they write poems that are finally no different in method from English nature poetry. That is, they give us a *paysage moralisé*, more or less precisely noted, a landscape which reflects the human image. There may be disorder in it; we may even observe "nature red in tooth and claw," but even the chaotic is placed in a frame of civilized observation. Nature is observed by man, who seems always firmly anchored in the human world. This is the method of Herbert and Gray, of Keats and Yeats: it is also the method of Williams and Frost. The "nature" Frost observes often seems to lie at the edge of the inhuman American wilderness, but Frost deals only with what is at the edge, and always includes what he sees in a firmly moralized landscape. Whitman, too, sees nature in a human setting; it is a projection of his own inclusive self. But just as Dickey's typical use of the image is different from that of Whitman, Williams or Frost, so the poetry he produces is, at its most distinctive, like no other "nature poetry."

In Dickey's work, the inhuman is no longer contained in the human arena. He has created a poetry of American nature, a nature we recognize in Melville, in the documents of American history, and in the daily papers. Its subject is the wilderness that was raped by the first settlers and has taken its revenge by continuing to dominate and excite our hearts. Dickey moves out into the wilderness, is contained in it, and runs with the animals. It is a terrible risk he takes, and it produces, at its best, a terrifying poetry.

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The Past Reordered

BATTLE REPORT. *By Harvey Shapiro. Wesleyan University Press. 77 pp. $1.85 paper.*

DAVID IGNATOW

Mr. Ignatow's most recent collection of verse is Figures of the Human *(Wesleyan University Press).*

I am moved by a sense of purification in this book. *Battle Report* consists of selections from three previous collections and an opening group of more recent poems, an arrangement which impels the reader to seek out certain implications. Here is a poem, "Past Time," from the late period:

I believe we came together
Out of ignorance not love,
Both being shy and hunted in the city.
In the hot summer, touching each other,
Amazed at how love could come
Like a waterfall, with frightening force
And bruising sleep. Waking at noon,
Touching each other for direction,
Out of ignorance not love

And here is "The Marriage," from *Mountain, Fire, Thornbush,* Harvey Shapiro's third book, published in 1961:

When they were canopied, and had the wine
To lace their spirits in the trembling cup,
And all the holy words sang round their heads
In tribute to the maker and the vine,
He saw the leeching sea lap, like darkness,
Up her summer's gown, as if dark time
And he should race to claim the maidenhead.
When he smashed the cup, then ruin spread.
The dazzled floor showed sea and blood.
Beyond this harvest that the ritual bore
(Their mothers weeping on the farther shore)
They saw the journeying years extend.
And Zion's hill rose for their reckoning.

Consider in the latter the conception of the dark, sacramental wine likened to death as at the same time it draws the marriage into direct relationship with the eternal godhead. Bride and bridegroom, journeying toward Zion, the manifest eternal, are fixed forever in their relationship toward each other, removed from the exigencies of a transient world. Acting in support, the ritual language lifts the wedding to its symbolical level of absolute truth, to the measure of the traditional and majestical iambic foot, rhymed.

But then examine the language of "Past Time" in its very nearly brutal gesture. Direct, plain, matter of fact in tone, without flourish or apology, it sets the marriage in its ordinary, quotidian, circumstantial text. God, Zion and preordination are either abolished or, having vanished in the daily struggle for existence, are now forgotten without regret or afterthought. A fury of discovery races through the poem to give it the curt power of its accomplishment. We are alone and that is the point Harvey Shapiro hammers home in the language and in the text, alone with no one but ourselves to preside over our faults, frailties, the world being just this, ours to make.

All these recent poems, including "Past Time," could be grouped together as one, with the effect of each leading to the next. Uncompromising in tone and point of view, their content would permit conjecture as to what precisely in the poet's life led to such a radical change of style. But that would be irrelevant to the point of the poems, which is that they are entirely a fresh departure, written with a vigor altogether different from and even superior to the earlier poems. They spring from a dual vision in the poet of disillusionment, and regeneration born from disillusionment. That which led to his despair turns out not to have had basis in reality in the first place, its connection with reality specious at most. The permanent and immutable are to be found in the processes of life itself of which we are one expression, no matter what form of it we take. To live is to endure and it is through endurance that we manifest the energy of life:

I cast out
Beyond the demonic element
And the fear of death
(And the fear of death)
Into that bright water
Beyond this water
Where leviathan swims.
Communication is instant
When it comes — close
As my hand, the words on my tongue,
Though the crying in my ear
Is my own death crying,

Harvey Shapiro has been able to extend this achievement into the public area of our lives, to give us one of the few notable poems on the death of President Kennedy, "National Cold Storage Company":

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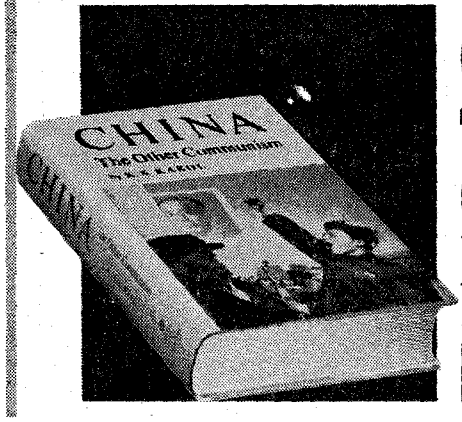

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The National Cold Storage Company
contains
More things than you can dream of.
Hard by the Brooklyn Bridge it stands
In a litter of freight cars,
Tugs to one side; the other, the traffic
Of the Long Island Expressway.
I myself have dropped into it in seven
years
Midnight tossings, plans for escape, the
shakes.
Add this to the national total —
Grant's tomb, the Civil War, Arlington,
The young President dead.
Above the warehouse and beneath the
stars
The poets creep on the harp of the
Bridge.
But see,
They fall into the National Cold
Storage Company
One by one. The wind off the river is
too cold,
Or the times too rough, or the Bridge
Is not a harp at all. Or maybe
A monstrous birth inside the warehouse
Must be fed by everything — ships,
poems,
Stars, all the years of our lives.

The poignancy of this poem has also its application to the many recent poems of love and marriage in the book. These are not written from defeat either but out of a need to know if one would live.

Despite the contrast the earlier work makes with the new poems, it is very much a preparation for what follows. I am referring especially to Shapiro's experience as an Air Force radio gunner in World War II, used in an account in retrospect in the title poem to the book, "Battle Report." Too long to quote in full, the poem is clearly written out of an obsession with the experience:

In this slow dream's rehearsal,
Again I am the death-instructed kid,
Gun in its cradle, sun at my back,
Cities below me without sound.
That tensed, corrugated hose
Feeding to my face the air of
substance,
I face the mirroring past.
We swarm the skies, determined
armies,
To seek the war's end, the silence
stealing,
The mind grown hesitant as breath.

Defeated in his effort at a relatively calm redress, Shapiro continued to search still further back in his past for other ways to recover himself. With his exceptional knowledge of Hebrew history and religion, such poems as "The Wedding" followed, rich in evocation of Hebrew faith and wisdom, and poignant with his need. From "Dream of Life":

But yesterday I saw
Seven gulls pass overhead.
It may be tonight I will dream myself
into a promise of life.

In his way, Shapiro repeats the experience of countless young men after the war in search of a surety of some kind that life comes first, after all. Many did finally manage to come to terms with their past of bomb and bayonet and to lead a fairly normal existence, digging as far as they could without loss of self-respect into ritual and the secular conformations of America. These became for them their haven, allowing them to live contentedly (or perhaps not so contentedly) for the balance of their days with wives, children, mortgaged homes, television sets and cars: the evidence of a fulfilled existence. In Harvey Shapiro another thing was at work. The afterstrain of war, it could be said, continued to act on him, with this latest book as a result, in which he decisively sheds the religious aura and again as in his gunner days stands exposed—but shield and weapon are himself now, invulnerable in his life. In "News of the World":

The past, like so many bad poems,
Waits to be reordered,
And the future needs reordering too.
Rain dampens the brick,
And the house sends up its smell
Of smoke and lives —
My own funk the major part.
Angling for direction,
I think of the favored in Homer,
Who in a dream, a council meeting,
At the bottom of despair,
Heard the voice of a god or goddess,
Though it was, say, only Polites
Speaking. Turning to a friend,
I ask again
For news of the world.

MORE ENTERPRISE

A sideways flicker, half headshake of doubt —
Meaning, confusingly, assent — fills out
The scant wardrobe of gesture I still use.
It clings by habit now. The old strait swank
I came in struts the town on local heirs.
Koula's nephew has the suit she shrank,
Andreas coveted my Roman shoes. . . .
Into the grave I'll wear that Yes of theirs.

JAMES MERRILL

THE KITCHEN KNIGHT

O my white armor, my copper or stainless steel
Or aluminum brainstorms, each with its steam panache!
The woman comes, goes, turns me off,
Wipes me dry, and sits down to her meal.

A fussy, elderly muse who needs a man,
She looks at raw experience with distaste.
Who doesn't? Yet when she passes it on to me
My code constrains me to do all I can.

JAMES MERRILL

LOVE'S EDGE

It is summer in my apartment, like last summer.
I have only to touch the thermostat,
the air cools and fans.
What was that? A light turns on and off
at a distance, as if someone crossed
between me and fire,—or was signaling.
Possibly the wind bent a branch across
a lighted window, or an automobile
turned away.
Her passion was almost unnoticeable,
—like the statue of Saint Teresa in ecstasy,
looking to heaven, a single toe crooked sharply,
her mouth barely open, showing the edge
of a marble tongue. How was I to know?
Flesh is a ghost, inarticulate.

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Poet at the Podium

SIDNEY BERNARD

Mr. Bernard is New York editor of Literary Times *and roving editor of* The Smith.

Russian poetry has taken to the road in a theatrical sense—and has stirred an extraordinary audience response in the case of the United States, in "stick" towns like New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh and San Francisco. The two leading exemplars—Yevtushenko and Voznesensky—of the Russian school of poetry-as-recital did, in a way, no more than what comes naturally on home grounds. The forte—especially since Mayakovsky—of declamation, of "styling" poetry as an acted-out experience, was what gave the road shows their vibrancy. By and large, the American experience has been different—at least insofar as acted-out poetry goes. The closest example was of course Dylan Thomas—and he was an on-loan quantity at most. Earlier, and indeed, milder, examples were—Vachel Lindsay and Carl Sandburg. But the guitar, more than voice and theatrical effects, was the adjunct to the lines. The general rule could be put: whereas Russian poets, at least in recital, get in front of the poetry, American poets get behind it; even in the Read-Ins against the war in Vietnam, this basic style does not change. In any case, Yevtushenko and Voznesensky stirred U.S. poetry juices, as did, too, Pablo Neruda, who in his own way is an exemplar, within the Spanish-speaking poetry tradition, of the same style of declamative verse. The contrast, finally, was dramatically on view when Voznesensky gave his New York recital; here the Russian and several American poets (who read translations) appeared together and the two styles got full, back-to-back display.

For Yevgeny Yevtushenko's reading last fall, the calls for tickets were coming into the 92nd Street YM/YWHA at a flood tide—not simply from regulars but from poetry lovers like *Time*, *Life* and *Newsweek*. Less than 700 seats, and just about all of Manhattan suddenly wanted in. Nor did it help much if you had a friend at the Russian Embassy, or knew so-and-so at the poet's New York publishing house, or had to be there to *cover* the reading. Best you could get, finally, was a ticket to closed-circuit in the art gallery, adjacent to the auditorium. After which you, and most others in the gallery, managed to slip through unguarded doors, ending up hugging the auditorium's dark mahogany walls for the reading.

After a half hour's delay, the reading was opened by Robert Lowell. A long table at stage right bristled with three microphones—before two of which sat a short, bearded interpreter, Edward L. Keenan, and the poet's English reader, Barry Boys, a handsome young actor. Lowell, tall, a little stooped, came to the stand-up microphone at stage center, and waited several seconds for the crowd to quiet down. Hesitant, and with an air of almost painful diffidence, he then began his remarks by alluding to Yevtushenko as a "world-wide cultural and political figure." One who had, Lowell continued, stood up for a number of causes, among them the right of poets to talk about politics. Lowell, now crossing his legs in splayed position, now drawing back from the microphone to score a point, referred in passing to his own political confrontation, offering in a fillip of irony the thought that "if you're Jane Austen, you can ignore Napoleonic wars if you want to."

The undercurrent of Lowell's brief introduction seemed more than just hands-across-the-border protocol. There was an edge to his words, as of hanging lightning; and the diffidence of delivery, the way he clasped and unclasped his hands, the steps he took (as if in pain) away and toward the microphone, all added to a taut portrait in motion of a middle-aged poet doing battle with himself—and in a way for the audience looking on—to find that means by which art and conscience merge and must stand. He made a small joke of what Yevtushenko had told him, that we must find a way "to get rid of the two black cats that stand in our paths." And he ended his remarks with what seemed an invocation: "I have a sense of a classical moment, of someone Greek standing in the wing, preferably a lady, telling us that the hour is one of danger. . . ." He hesitated again, pursed his mouth, put away the few scratch notes he held, notes that he referred to only once or twice. Robert Lowell then said the words, "I give you Yevgeny Yevtushenko," and he was off behind the curtains even before the Russian poet came forward.

That sense of foreboding, grave but gritty, gave way to a lighter mood, as Yevtushenko looked out at the crowd. He is tall—aged 33—and carries himself with almost a bamboo give. He was wearing a gray polo shirt, which fell in a neat line below the waist of his gray-and-white striped trousers. For several seconds his eyes, which under

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the lights had a blue-gray brightness, did a darting dance to all sections of the hall.

Yevtushenko's sharp bony face was a polygraph—and remained so all evening long—of a whole range of inner tunes, and the one that registered first, as the crowd applauded and cheered him (some from their seats and many who were standing) was of a man happy for the greeting but impatient for the poetry. His first words were "*Spasibo* . . . thanks for coming," given in Russian, and then repeated by the translator, who had joined him at the microphone. When the crowd finally eased back in their seats, the poet reminded them that they might have had enough of speeches, during the last days of an election, and that in any case he was there for the poetry. Yevtushenko nodded to his reader who came forward from the table, while the poet and translator returned to it, and the evening was opened with Boys reading "Babi Yar" from manuscript.

No monument stands over Babi Yar

—the opening line, read by Boys in motionless calm, brought a soft ripple of recognition from the audience. Boys soon gained momentum, now weaving the lines, now drumming them across in a tone of anger. At the table, the poet cast a sharp eye through the hall. He shifted in his seat, or cupped his cheek tightly with his hand. And his angular face, lips pale and expressive, hair a finespun brown and cut short, was never quiescent. When Boys rang out the three jagged lines, "Hounded,/ spat on,/ slandered," a cold anger flickered across Yevtushenko's features. And when he came to the Anne Frank passage:

I seem to be
Anne Frank
transparent
as a branch in April.
And I love.
And have no need of phrases.

Yevtushenko's face lit up in innocence. At the end of the piece, the poet rose from his seat and exchanged places with Boys. He waited for the applause to fade and then recited "Babi Yar" in his own tongue, from memory. He employed a sharp, evenly paced declamative style, with stiff or sweeping gestures of the hands, the hands now and then molded into fists; and his lean body full of sway, as if to dance the muse. And the voice, pitched a little high and silvery, a voice of near-inexhaustible drive.

"Babi" was followed by "Sleep My Beloved," a lyric charged with soft lamentation, which Boys and the poet recited in near-hushed tones, drawing audible sighs here and there. Next came "Portrait of Childhood," which delineated a moment of violence, as well as of shame and disgust, out of the poet's youth (the violence of a gang of toughs beating up a stranger)—Yevtushenko giving the lines a passion that fell on the ears like blows. A lighter and broadly satiric mood came next, a sort of filmic Baedeker of international James Bonds called "Impressions of the Western Cinema." Here the poet drew rounds of laughs and some mock hissing as he ticked off a veritable rogues' gallery of spies (including ". . . the Chinese agent, the gaunt Li Chu"). Also "The City of Yes, the City of No," which described the poet's metaphorical journeying between the No city ("Each object there/ sullenly scowls") and the Yes city (where "Any star in the sky/ just begs to fall into your hands")—the long and bitter "Colosseum," a monograph on man's cruelty from the sacrificial days of Rome to the more impersonal killing of the nuclear age ("Hallooers,/ hounders,/ from your safe seats/ you squeal/ at us to be fearless")—and the two ending poems, "Why Did You Do That?" and "Hail in Kharkov," the latter a joyous, Dylanesque evocation of falling sheets of hail, on one level, and a political rally cry (anti-Stalinist) on another. (The poem's theme: people who run from a storm—and people, the young in heart, who revel in it.) The English translations were those of George Reavey and Geoffrey Dutton, about half and half.

It was a two-hour set, with no intermission. And with a question period to come, announced by Yevtushenko with a broad grin, which could have been read as glee *plus* a small anxiety. What came out, and soon enough, was something in between the two—i.e., a waspish show of temper on Yevtushenko's part that was a surprise to some and worth laughs to others. The Q. and A. went this way: *Man* (from far back): "What did you think of Senator Robert Kennedy?" (The poet met Kennedy, the day before, at the Senator's New York apartment.) *Poet* (crisply): "An interesting man. . . ." *Lady* (with cultivated voice): "What is your *phee*losophy of poetry?" (Question arrives as if by fourth-class mail.) *Poet* (blinking): "I write poetry—that is my *philosophy*." *Man* (cautiously): "What do you think of the poetry of Mao Tse-tung?" (Audience laughs.) *Poet*: "Well—I hadn't thought. . . . Maybe the same as he thinks of mine." *Man*: "Would you read some more—Mandelstam, Pushkin . . . (this or that) poem of yours?" *Poet* (tartly): "I don't believe in dictation. Not from audiences, or elsewhere." *Man*: "What

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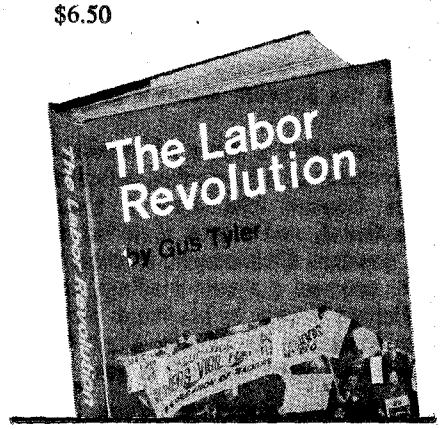

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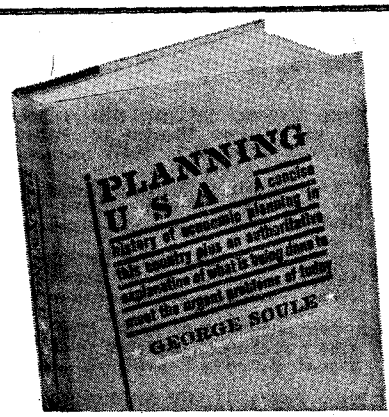

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is your relationship with John Steinbeck?" *Poet*: "My relationship with him is—*private*." *Man*: "Is your pretty wife, Galina, with you? We'd like to meet her." *Poet* (quickly): "Maybe she wouldn't like to meet *you*." And more questions, some perhaps not so "loaded."

The crowd was a broad mix of New York's cultural *cognoscenti* — college youths of both the brushed and lank-haired variety, assistant English professor types, people from the stage and concert halls, several poets from above and below the 14th Street geographical line (i.e., the line that separates *avant* from establishment poets in terms of, say, style, if not necessarily politics) and a good number of older, and old-European types who in the main appeared to be getting the full drift of both the English and the Russian versions of the readings.

There was a sense all evening of the electricity of a happening, combined with the bravura (the latter a touch old-fashioned, and maybe even "square") of a one-man Chautauqua, Russian version. By contrast, our own readings, say from Richard Wilbur to Marianne Moore, are to Yevtushenko what a sleek GM car is to a troika. Soundless gear shifting, in one case; an earthy clobber of wheels on cobblestones, in the other. As to the poetry, the differences seem just as sharp. Where most established American poets are private, alienated and/or Ivy League-paced, Yevtushenko is open, didactic and full of immediacy. Put another way, our poets seem to "suffer" their art; Yevtushenko beards his and comes up with a song.

There is, of course, an affinity between the Russian poet and our own *avant*, those of the East Side explosion starting with Allen Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti. The *avant*, as is Yevtushenko, are attacking establishment mores, but pot rather than politics is the spur. (Vietnam excepted.) And only in Ferlinghetti, among the *avant*, do you get an approximation of Yevtushenko's lyricism, and then only fleetingly. As to the poems' lasting or literary qualities, this was almost beside the point. On one level alone, the performing one, he is a poet to see.

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A Murderous Solvent

NEAR THE OCEAN. *By Robert Lowell. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 123 pp. $6.*

PAUL ZWEIG

Mr. Zweig is a poet who teaches English at Columbia University.

Robert Lowell's new book is entitled *Near The Ocean;* yet we discover as we read that it is a strangely hostile ocean; a place from which the Gorgon's head is fished up "with all its stranded snakes uncoiled/ here beheaded and despoiled." There are no voyages to be made on or under this water. All one can do is sink into it, with "eyes worn white as moons from hitting-bottom."

Indeed, Lowell's title takes on new meaning if we consider the first image in the book: a chinook salmon, "nosing up to the impossible/ stone and bone-crushing waterfall—/ raw-jawed, weak-fleshed there." The salmon batters its life out on the way upstream, trying wildly to outlast the current that drags it back toward the ocean.

Already in *Lord Weary's Castle* Lowell's water was a murderous solvent: the very element of that self-destructive violence which overwhelms the rhetoric of the book with its knotted rhythms, its glimpse of past America dragged down by a kind of vengeance. The poet's life is described in the book as a precarious balance, "skating on thin ice," while "Whore and Beast and Dragon rise for air/ From allegoric waters." Lowell's heroes in *Lord Weary's Castle* were Christ and Ahab. Even his tormented Catholicism was above all a confrontation with the concealed energies of the sea, where "the ghost/ of risen Jesus walks the waves." As for Ahab, one suspects that he is the hero Lowell already knew he was not: Ahab turned to face the ocean that maimed him. Lowell's hard rhetoric leads him upstream, away from the ambiguous "asylum" of water.

The new volume, *Near The Ocean,* contains some memorable lines and stanzas, yet on the whole it is a disappointing book. The group of five poems, from which the title is taken, occupy almost half the volume. The rest is devoted, for the most part, to a number of translations in the Lowell manner, plus too many undistinguished drawings by Sidney Nolan, illustrating lines and couplets from the poems themselves. The whole is eked out by careful page composition, meant to inflate a rather meager volume to the full size befitting the stature—one hopes not equally inflated—of "our greatest poet."

What disappoints, however, is not so much the size or page design of the volume but the sense rather that we have been here before. Lowell's tense rhythms, the harsh formality of his style, create a mood that is curiously impersonal, held at a distance from the life which the poet seems to be confessing. It is an impersonality of surfaces, as if Lowell, "skating on thin ice," had devoted all his considerable verbal power to the task of bolstering, ordering and tying together what is utterly familiar. Most of the poems are written in doggerel couplets, rhymed and slant rhymed. The result is a hurried rhetoric which, at its best, has a swift, almost classical incisiveness to it, as in these lines near the end of "Waking Early Sunday Morning":

> *Only man thinning out his kind*
> *sounds through the Sabbath noon, the blind*
> *swipe of the pruner and his knife*
> *busy about the tree of life . . .*

Here the hard surface of the poem gives way for a moment; the violence of war becomes strangely quiet; the wit of "man thinning out his kind" gains a haunting profundity from the steady "blind swipe" of the hand that trims life with death. Too often, however, Lowell gives in to the natural energy of doggerel verse: an energy apt for satire and neat epigrams,

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but not for the power and the self-revealing violence which the poet intends. As a result, the poems often appear unsettled. They start off in several directions at once, keeping the reader from a sustained commitment to the attitudes and images Lowell describes. Almost all of "Fourth of July in Maine" moves in this undecided way from descriptive, broadside couplets like these:

Civil Rights clergy face again
the scions of the good old strain,
the poor who always must remain
poor and Republican in Maine.

to the familiar family poetry of *Life Studies* ("Dear Cousin, life is much the same," etc.), to a momentary gesture toward the sublime:

We watch the logs fall. Fire once gone,
we're done for: we escape the sun,
rising and setting, a red coal,
until it cinders like the soul.

Fragmentation has always been a danger in Lowell's work. His poems, even at their best, do not have a sustained, dramatic impetus. The unit his imagination works best with is the line, the couplet or the stanza. Rarely does he extend his vision beyond that, preferring instead to begin again, to proceed by sudden, unaccountable shifts, by changes of voice. As if his imagination had lost interest after its initial thrust, or was unwilling to follow its own momentum down beneath the mosaic of surfaces. One rarely feels a texture of inevitability behind the shifts, as in a many-voiced poem like "The Waste Land." The real difficulty of *Lord Weary's Castle,* for example, lies not so much in its cluttered rhetoric as in the discontinuity of the poems; their abrupt shifts of imagery and theme are erratic or simply too private to be transferred into the reader's imagination.

Of all Lowell's works, *Life Studies* comes closest to solving this problem of discontinuity. The confessional mood of the book is sustained throughout. Such poems as "Beyond the Alps," or the series of commemorative poems in Part Three, have a density which is never cluttered. They express Lowell, perhaps, at his best. Yet it is a curiously unpoetic best. Though his verse is hard and incisive, its very swiftness has a quality of epigrammatic prose. It is worldly in a way that a certain kind of 18th-century rhetoric is worldly. Lowell is, in Pope's sense, a student of man: a student of those presentable, if terrible, surfaces which are turned outward, made into social habits, familiar attitudes, even into familiar pains. The prose fragment which forms the heart of *Life Studies* reads like a series of painful, self-rending anecdotes for a society column. The style is brilliant and kaleidoscopic, pointing in anecdote after anecdote toward an emptiness of emotion, and an underlying fear which it keeps always at a distance as if to have allowed their eruptive rhythms into the light of language would have been indecorous.

Lowell's many-times-great-grandfather spoke wisely to him from his portrait frame: "We are all dealers in used furniture." There is indeed too much used furniture in this world of angular emotions, of pains told in a loud voice, as if they had passed through many hands, retaining the smell of each, but the singular, delicate nuance of none. A brilliant prose imagination is at work in *Life Studies,* which gets no closer to the ocean—to the eruptive energies beneath the surface—than the Hill in Boston where that other dry-docked commodore, father Lowell, kept house, instilling a distrust of depths into his son which he has since wrestled with but rarely conquered.

For the Union Dead stands out because in half a dozen of its poems the familiar worldly violence transforms itself. A quiet voice is heard, as if something in Lowell's imagination had begun anew turning the tools of his language toward some "infinitely tender, infinitely suffering thing." Think of these stanzas in Fall, 1961:

Our end drifts nearer,
the moon lifts,
radiant with terror.
The state
is a diver under a glass bell.

A father's no shield
for his child.
We are like a lot of wild
spiders crying together
but without tears.

There is indeed nothing to protect us, no literary shield for the shock of what such an image of "wild spiders" reveals. If our analogy of the ocean has any value, then Lowell is closer here to the ocean than anywhere in his poetry. The character in "The Mouth of the Hudson" "drifts with the wild ice/ ticking seaward down the Hudson." There is a poignancy in the final words of the poem "Water."

We wished our two souls
might return like gulls
to the rock. In the end
the water was too cold for us.

Poems like this open a breach in the vigorous play of surfaces which has always characterized Lowell. Their consistency, for once, is not "literary"; it is personal in a way that the confessional poems have not often been.

Our cultural world in America is singularly unattuned to poetry. Our sensibility, at ease with the novel, distrusts what the peculiar, unnarrative rhythms of poetry have to say: the concern with quietness and depths, the imagery of the unconscious mind, the inwardness. Lowell's poetry avoids these meditative rhythms. By avoiding the "ocean," by fleeing into prose, he has created a language in which the novel readers can be at home. It is a poetry which describes, but does not respond to, the exasperated rhythm of our cities. Lowell, in his brilliant, pained way, sets out to tell it as it is. If the poems are nervous and violent, it is because our own scene is nervous and violent. If the poems are fragmented, it is because our world is stifled and discontinuous. Lowell tells and dramatizes for us what we know: the neuroses, the family struggle, the ugliness.

Missing too often from his style is that element of praise which, for Rilke,

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100 Years of Fighting Stampedes *

NATION has managed to survive, the Decatur (Illinois) *Herald* observed on the occasion of our centennial, *"by fighting stampedes for over 100 years."*

Heading off stampedes is peculiarly American; the country has the energy and space to set hoofs really thundering. We call to mind only a few of the most irrational flights: the jingoism that plunged us into wars with Mexico and Spain, the hypocritical hysteria of Prohibition, the "uproar" of McCarthyism, "Let's Get Hoffa!," "Send in the Marines!" (to Haiti, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, etc.), "we must beat the Russians to the moon," the anti-missile missile, the SST. The list is long. Some of the stampedes of the last 102 years ran over us roughshod, some we slowed a bit, some we helped to stop. But there are few we failed to challenge. If you think *Bonanza* is where the action is, come out on the range with *The Nation.*

**("Stampede, any headlong flight of a large group; from the Mex.-Sp.* estampida *or 'uproar.'")*

"This book suggests that poets have begun to want a public or political role — or at least that poets, as thoughtful and responsible-feeling persons, are finding themselves unable to refuse such a role."

Wendell Berry
The Nation 4/24/67

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was the poet's special gift, as he wrote in the Ninth Elegy:

Are we here *perhaps just to say:*
house, bridge, well, gate, fruit tree,
window —
at most column, tower . . . but to say,
understand this, to say it
as the Things themselves never
fervently thought to be.

That, for Rilke, is what the suffering was for: to recompose, out of the intense experience, what would otherwise have been indescribable. Not only to tell the storm, but to see through it, into the eye of the storm.

At Full Speed

THE LOST PILOT. *By James Tate. Yale University Press. 72 pp. $3.75. Paper $1.45.*

M. L. ROSENTHAL
Mr. Rosenthal is professor of English at New York University. He is the author, most recently, of The New Poets *(Oxford University Press).*

As with so many of the recent Yale Series of Younger Poets volumes, James Tate's *The Lost Pilot* gives us poetry of speed more than of power. Most of the poems zip down the slide toward punch-line endings. They gather notes of joy or poignancy on the way; then there's a splash, and *voilà!* that one's over. Seldom can we get a purchase on the poem in mid-slide. Seldom, despite Dudley Fitts's introductory praise of the poet's technical mastery, are the internal effects and balances any more than momentary brakes on the downward movement. Witness "Death on Columbus Day":

Sometimes you can hear the naked will
working, like the ocean becoming a
shore
yesterday, and the day before,
the trees shrinking away,
even the more transitional phase of
seasons,
the tenacious skidding of a gone
summer,
the cleaving to lusciousness,
and (you can see all this
from your window if you wash it
regularly, if you are afraid to go out)
even whole environments,
giants of varying kindness,
dissolve, and you, your pupils,
yes, blue as they may appear,
are, when you think about it,
acolytes to all destruction.

This particular poem consists of a single sentence, in some disarray, full of perhaps interesting thoughts if it had

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the time to stop and sort them out, but in a hurry despite them to make its final point. Rather a striking start, but then in the second line the syntax grows awkward and we shoot through a number of images without an opportunity to relate to them before the parenthetical thought—suggestive in itself—interrupts the speeding curve momentarily. Afterward, the series of images of irreversible dissolution is resumed, with the final twinge at the last line suggesting something undemonstrable, that the process is somehow helped by human consciousness.

That is to say, there are meaningful thoughts, feelings, impulses here, but the ordering is minimal, really insufficient. The justification might be that the poem seeks to evoke in a single quick sweep the pervasiveness of the death principle. The loss of what is to hand, of all our "known" reality, seems to take place in the wink of an eye. All right, but in the process some fine possibilities have been subordinated to the emergence of a near cliché. The more jumbled the preceding structure, the greater the poet's desire for a knockout ending, and so the pseudo-profundity of the highly arguable conclusion.

I hate to hear myself carping so, for certainly a number of these poems are very much alive. There are bright movements of darting association, as in "Coming Down Cleveland Avenue," which Fitts praises most highly of all. He likes its "weird and substantial" character, its "giddy *bourrée surréaliste*." So do I, though I should add that its high-spirited, amiably satirical buffoonery, and its sexily gay gallantry at the end, particularly lend themselves to Tate's accelerated style as well as to his love of natural, unaffected speech. It is a bit reminiscent of some of Ferlinghetti's earlier, more sprightly effects, and of Jacques Prévert:

> *At one point*
> *you even lay down*
> *your coat, and she, in*
> *turn, puts hers down for*
> *you. And you put your*
> *shirt down, and she, her*
> *blouse, and your pants,*
> *and her skirt, shoes—*
> *removes her lavender*
> *underwear and you slip*
> *into her proud, white skin.*

It's fun, and one overlooks that the last line is not all that good—is an improvisation that stops the movement amusingly but too seamlessly, as it were. It is "young poetry," as Fitts says, though not as "utterly new" as he claims. The poem is of a piece with "Violins" ("She knew how to make a moment famous"), with "Why I Will Not Get Out of Bed" ("I don't love you"—that's the reason the speaker in this poem of liberation from romantic bondage proffers for not getting up, filling its lines with a universe yet to be explored and re-explored), and with a few other sparklers.

I am reasonably sure that for Tate the main burden of his book is carried by the poems in a more somber vein. The title poem has to do with the loss of his father who, the jacket tells us, "was reported missing over Germany" five months after the son's birth in 1943. It is a complaint against this loss, and against the ambiguity of the meaning of survival and of the son's own identity. The father was lost at the age of 22, and the poem conceives of him as the child must have done, as orbiting endlessly about the earth. The son could not have been much older when he wrote "The Lost Pilot." In it he suggests that his father has avoided the "rot" of actual survival, has escaped his destiny to become hardened into an immortal and unreachable symbol, "hard like ebony" or "like a tiny, African god." The sense of meanings that one has to try to gather up quickly but still cannot hold onto, meanings that account for everything but that are forbidden and guilty, is perfectly summed up in its final lines. The thought here suggests a rationale for Tate's poetic method, and at the same time helps account for the pain in the poem, "To Mother on Father's Day," the suicidal imagery in a number of the poems, and the curious linking in others of motifs of passion with those of despair. In poems like these, as opposed to the ones that are simply thrown away by the pell-mell method, more than a hint is given us of the possibilities for poetic realization in this vigorous writer, whose work at the present time only barely contains the pressure of his emotional intensities:

> *My head cocked towards the sky,*
> *I cannot get off the ground,*
> *and, you, passing over again,*
>
> *fast, perfect, and unwilling*
> *to tell me that you are doing*
> *well, or that it was mistake*
>
> *that placed you in that world,*
> *and me in this; or that misfortune*
> *placed these worlds in us.*

This special poetry issue of the Books and the Arts section was prepared jointly by Helen Yglesias, Literary Editor and Michael Goldman, Poetry Editor.

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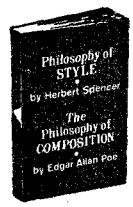

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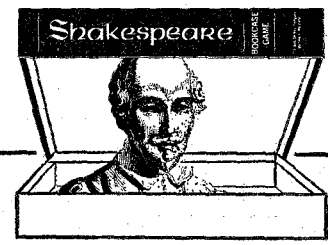

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Translating Cesar Vallejo

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Mr. Eshleman is a poet and translator who teaches at New York University. The Peruvian poet, César Vallejo (1892-1938), while hardly known in the United States, is one of the great figures in Latin American poetry. Of part Indian ancestry, Vallejo eloquently voices in his work the sufferings of the Indians and other underprivileged peoples. His books of poetry include Los Heraldos Negros, Trilce *and* España, Aparta de Mi Este Cáliz *(Spain Give to Me This Cup), the last a group of poems resulting from his alignment with the cause of the Republic in the Spanish Civil War. His last book,* Poemas Humanos, *posthumously published in Spanish, will be published in English this year by Grove Press. Mr. Eshleman is the translator of this collection of ninety-four poems.*

"Intensity & Height" is considered to be one of the great sonnets of the Spanish language; it is also a fair indication of what a poet faces in translating César Vallejo.

Most apparent is the difficulty in handling the end words of the octet, all of which come as surprises and swing the eight lines through their all-in-nothing, nothing-in-all dialectic, which is itself grounded in the pithy *uma* and hollow *ollo* end-rhymes. I decided that if I could make a listener hear an octet in my English, even though it was not a perfect one, then by a shift of rhythms I could move into the sestet.

The first major problem is with *"me atollo." Atollarse* means to be stuck in the mud; it is a crude rural shout, for which we have only swear words. As the reader can see, the word I choose for *"me atollo"* determines the word used for the second jawbreaker, *"cogollo,"* in line 4, since the *uma* rhymes fall pretty naturally into "spume," "sum" and "puma." As a matter of fact, I decided upon "stick" for *"me atollo"* unaware that in some notes on the poem I had written "neck" as one possibility for *"cogollo."* "Stick" lacks the reverberation and exactness of *"me atollo,"* yet it *does* stick, and end-jams the line. *"Cogollo"* drove me crazy for four years, during which time I kept trying to figure out how I could say "cabbage-heart" or "plant-shoot" in such a way that a second denotation of the Spanish word—"apex"—(which Vallejo plays off against "pyramid" earlier in the line) would obtain. When I understood that the cabbage-heart joins plant to earth, a head/body image came forth. I decided that a pyramid with a neck was about as strange as Vallejo's line and would force an attentive reader into the deeper implications in such a way that "root" or "core" would not.

The English lines begin to lengthen out naturally in the second stanza. Vallejo's great sixth line again cuts on two levels that are nearly impossible to suggest with one English word: *encebollarse,* which makes a verb out of *cebollo* (onion) and which must have originated in a Spanish kitchen, does not mean that Vallejo wants to make an onion out of himself; rather, while carrying the common meaning it also means to defraud oneself or to be bundled (as onions), to be infuriated before the dishonest proposition of the laurel. "Wreathed in garlic" was suggested to me by the poet, Cid Corman. The phrase carries much of the frustration, keeps my homemade rhyme scheme going and, more than anything else, suggests Vallejo's wit, which is much more frequent in the Spanish of *Poemas Humanos* than I can keep up with in my English.

The last two octet lines were less exasperating to catch; while we have "brume" for *"bruma"* I decided against it because it is too heavy. Using "mist" I hit my fourth "ick" "eck" "lic" sound and then could round off the octet by choosing "evolution," a very weighted word, from the number of possibilities *"desarrollo"* suggests. The heavy *u* in evolution picks up the *umes* and *ums,* and somehow I have myself an octet. I should mention here that the choice of "evolution" against, say, "unwinding" has a lot to do with knowing the other ninety-three poems in the book. Vallejo believed there was no God without evolution.

The shout "Let's go," at which point the poem beautifully turns—faced with the impossibility of resolution in the octet to explore what we're stuck with and *can* do in the sestet—is the first of a series of tighteners reining movement in. Here I did not want to push my former luck with end-words, so I built two compact units in which any rhyme at all is internalized. The last line of the poem was most ornery: *cuerva* is a she-crow or female jackdaw (or maybe even a lady rook), but there is no one-word equivalent in English and I could not make one up without ruining the poem's effect. What I finally chose was a compromise, held in place hopefully by the quick *ate* echoing.

A translator's talents are at best tools for his first task: to annihilate himself, facing another's inspiration.

INTENSIDAD Y ALTURA

Quiero escribir, pero me sale espuma,
quiero decir muchísimo y me atollo;
no hay cifra hablada que no sea suma,
no hay pirámide escrita, sin cogollo.

Quiero escribir, pero me siento puma;
quiero laurearme, pero me encebollo.
No hay toz hablada, que no llegue a bruma,
no hay dios ni hijo de dios, sin desarrollo.

Vámonos, pues, por eso, a comer yerba,
carne de llanto, fruta de gemido,
nuestra alma melancólica en conserva.

Vámonos! Vámonos! Estoy herido;
vámonos a beber lo ya bebido,
vámonos, cuervo, a fecundar tu cuerva.

27 OCTOBER 1937

INTENSITY & HEIGHT

I want to write, but it comes out spume,
I want to say so much & I stick;
there's no cipher spoken not a sum,
no pyramid written, without neck.

I want to write, but I feel myself, puma!
I want the laurel but I'm wreathed in garlic.
There's no cough spoken that doesn't come to mist,
no god or son of god, without evolution.

Let's go then for this & feed
on grass, weep flesh, groan fruit,
our melancholy soul canned.

Let's go! Let's go! I'm hit;
let's go drink that already drunk,
crow, let's go fecundate your mate.

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Interior and Exterior Worlds

NORTHFIELD POEMS. *By A. R. Ammons. Cornell University Press. 69 pp. $3.95.*

JOHN LOGAN
Mr. Logan is professor of English at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is the author of Ghosts of the Heart *(University of Chicago Press) and* Spring of the Thief *(Alfred A. Knopf).*

A. R. Ammons is one of the most prolific and, at the same time, most intelligent gifted poets of recent years. *Northfield Poems* is his third book to appear in two years—with *Corsons Inlet* and *Tape for the Turn of the Year*—and there were two others in the previous ten-year period; *Ommateum* (which was privately printed) and *Expressions of Sea Level.*

Tape for the Turn of the Year, perhaps the most interesting single volume, is a continuing poem, mainly unrevised, which Ammons composed by inserting one end of an adding machine tape in a typewriter and proceeding to the other end. The imposed limitation of form apparently provided a pressure which helped to produce some very beautiful writing, all 200 pages of it in the mode of a journal extending over a period of about a month. The long, thin poem is occasionally ascetic in its effect (as an El Greco figure) and again it is snakelike. There is a passage where the poem shows a striking self-recognition of its phallic character:

> *If I had a flute: wdn't*
> *it be fine*
> *to see this long thin*
> *poem*
> *rise out of the waste-*
> *basket:*
> *the charmed erection,*
> *stiffening, uncoiling?*

Another passage catches from inside the work, toward its end, the speaker's sense of his own utterance:

> *I wrote about these*
> *days*
> *the way life gave them:*
> *I didn't know*
> *beforehand what I*
> *wd write, whether I'd meet*
> *anything new: I*
> *showed that I'm sometimes*
> *blank and abstract,*
> *sometimes blessed with song: some-*
> *times*
> *silly, vapid, serious,*
> *angry, despairing.*

The free form of the poem (despite its strict limitation on line length) and its willingness to risk "prose" and looser diction, has given it an utterly original tone, a curious blend of confession, lyricism and observation of two kinds—the strikingly concrete and the near abstract.

All three of these qualities recur in other books though there is less of the first—indeed less personal portraiture of any direct kind—in *Ommateum.* Confession begins with *Expressions of Sea Level* where, combined with childhood reminiscence as in "Nelly Myers" and "Silver" it has given us some of the most beautiful poems of our time:

> *I will not end my grief, earth will*
> *not end my grief,*
> *I move on,*
> *we move on, some scraps of us to-*
> *gether,*
> *my broken soul leaning toward her to*
> *be touched,*
> *listening to be healed.*

A number of poems in *Expressions, Corsons Inlet* and *Northfield,* as the names of the latter two hint, are based on experiences of places in South Jersey—where Mr. Ammons was for many years an executive in a chemical glass factory before turning to teaching.

Ammons' voice is unique and would not fail to be recognized even in the first book:

> *So I said I am Ezra*
> *and the wind whipped my throat*
> *gaming for the sounds of my voice*
> *I listened to the wind*
> *go over my head and up into the night.*

There is a return to the oracular, Old Testament-like persona of "Ezra" in the poem "The Wind Coming Down From" in the present volume. The poems of this book reiterate several motifs we are familiar with from the others, and they range from the highly abstract game-stance of "The Numbers":

> *be confident;*
> *as you turn to the numbers*
> *veracity*
> *links segment to segment: a sausage*
> *bliss!*

through the lecture-like sound of "The Motions" to the Biblical incantation of "Joshua Tree" on the one hand or the very direct, sure, imitative dialect of "First Carolina Said Song" on the other:

> *We got there just in time to see her*
> *buried*
> *in an oak grove up*
> *back of the field:*
> *its growed over with soapbushes and*
> *huckleberries now.*

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which the speaker relates to the wind, who instructs him to

settle here
by this Joshua Tree
and make a well.

The speaker, after lamenting that he is

consigned to
form that will not
let me loose
except to death

so that he "must go on" until then, asks that later the wind—muse-like and yet like a man—

enter angling through
my cage
and let my ribs
sing me out.

The wind is a frequent persona in the poems, as breath itself becomes fleshed out. Considering wind as breath one begins to see the connection between the poems of external landscape and the elements (which fill the first book and reappear here) and the poems of internal geography.

When I go back of my head
down the cervical well, roots
branch
turning, figuring
into flesh.

I don't like the line "meat's indivisible stuff" because its texture jars with the rest of the *coulage* of diction, but otherwise this poem, "Landscape with Figures," is one of the strongest in the collection.

There is a constant playing off of the interior world of mind and cells against the exterior world of things where self lies dispersed and in need of the gathering force of a poem. The rapport of interior and exterior is itself expressed in a perfect short poem entitled "Reflective," which I give here entire:

I found a
weed
that had a

mirror in it
and that
mirror

looked in at
a mirror
in

me that
had a
weed in it.

The half-solipsistic character of this is projected beautifully to trees in a fuller sense in the poem "Halfway":

birches stand
in

pools of them-
selves, the yellow
fallen

leaves reflecting
those on
the tree that
mirror the ground

From the idea of external—reflected—in—internal, one can move rather easily to the notion of the cosmos reflected in small in one of its parts, as in the striking poem, "The Constant," where the galaxy-like, moving film of sand in the water of a clam shell seems to reflect the scope of sky, so that:

a gull's toe could spill the universe:
two more hours of sun could dry it up;
a higher wind could rock it out. . . .

There is a marvelous imaging of the tentativeness with which things "live and move and have their being" as the Old Fellow said. This mood is seconded in "Contingency" where, contemplating all the life and change started by a sprinkler, one reflects that:

a turn of the faucet
dries every motion up.

And it is brought into a new key in the poem, "Zone," which suggests that a myth of creation is completed only by its parallel myth of uncreation. There is a constant need for recovery, whether for the shadows of trees (in "Recovery") or for time future (in "Passage")—

tomorrow emerges and
falls back shaped into today: end-
lessly

—or for the life of a man himself. For poets this latter kind of recovery is accomplished by the writing of poems, and when the poems are as good as these, it is sometimes accomplished for others by reading them.

Intellectuality is a prime trait of Ammons' work, as is suggested by the abstract character of several titles in the new book: "Height," "Reflective," "Contingency," "Interference," "Saliences." Sometimes, as in the latter poem and in "One-Many"—two of the most ambitious and strongest poems in the book—there is too much cerebration demanded of the reader, I believe, before the poem begins to burgeon. There are some other faults. Occasionally the poems seem to lack vigor. Occasionally influence obtrudes itself, as that of Marianne Moore in "Uh, Philosophy" or of Dylan Thomas in these punning, elegiac lines:

If bleak through the black night
we could outrun
this knowledge into a different morn-
ing!

or of T. S. Eliot in this passage: "though the world ends and cannot end" and "To death, the diffuse one going beside me, I said. . . ." (Yet the most pervasive influences—those of William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound—have been well assimilated to form a highly original body of work.) There are occasional bad lines: "O ablutions!" Yet, a careful look at the whole body of Ammons' work, particularly *Tape for the Turn of the Year* and the new book, will show that we are dealing with a major talent, one who has the courage and the heuristic power to discover new form, as well as the eye and the ear and the mind to hold us and to give us what Thomas called "the momentary peace of the poem."

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